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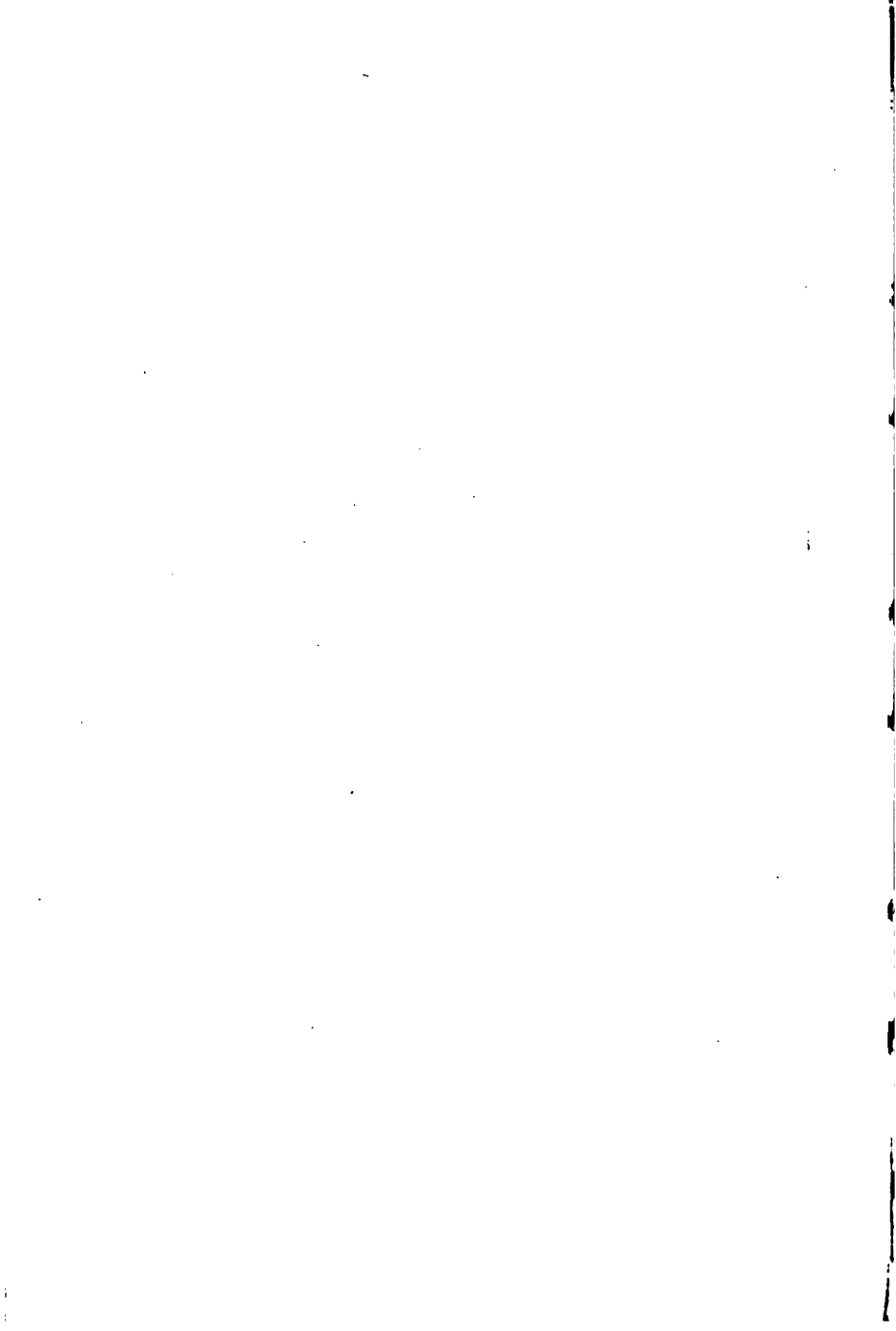
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COUSIN JULIA

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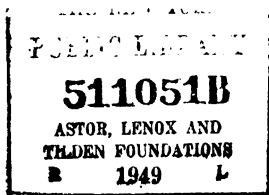


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II

TO
C. M. F.



PART I
THE THRESHOLD

I

THEIR name is Bradford, as I've told you a dozen times, Violet, not Bradley or Bradskey, or Brandon, I beg of you, but Bradford—J. C. Bradford, Cousin Jim to us, you understand, and Cousin Julia."

"I loathe the name of Julia. Julie, in the French way, is quite pretty, but Julia—!"

"Call her Cousin Julie, then; I've no doubt she'll prefer it. She's nothing if not progressive, I believe."

"The only Julia I ever knew I detested. She was such a stupid horror."

"Look here, whose Julia are we going to talk about, yours or mine?"

"Mine! I haven't got a Julia, thank heaven! I was just saying—"

"Never mind what you were just saying, Violet. I'm trying to talk about something important."

"So sorry, Bob. It simply occurred to me at the moment how stupid Julia Mal—"

Her husband threw up his hands with a gesture of impotent exasperation.

"Never *mind* her! And let me tell you one thing: the Julia in question is not stupid by any means, so please, Violet, try to remember what we're here for, and be decent to everybody."

Violet glanced at her husband for an instant with a look of calm appraisal. It was a look he detested and which made him uncomfortable.

Cousin Julia

"And what we're here for is, plainly speaking, to get as much money out of Cousin Jim as possible, I believe?"

"You like money as well as I do," snapped Tillinghurst.

"Well—" his wife inquired.

"Well, what?"

"You made such an obvious remark that I was waiting for you to follow it up with something."

"Oh, rubbish!" Tillinghurst got up abruptly and began throwing some things into an empty suitcase. He was tired and in a disagreeable frame of mind. He hated coming back to the Middle West where he had been born and lived as a child, even for a visit, and his wife had spent the day in a mood which made him long to slap her. As he rarely ventured upon the perils of an argument he evinced his present irritation by slamming things about as he repacked his bag.

Violet remained, as usual, entirely unmoved by this display of temper. On the whole it rather amused her to provoke it, as it relieved the general monotony of their intercourse. She even hummed a little tune she knew he disliked as she watched his activities. Then, conceiving a sudden, amiable interest in her appearance, she leaned forward and examined herself in the long mirror between the car windows. The night and day of travel had in no way bedraggled her, and her clear skin and smooth ash blonde hair were pleasingly fresh. The perception of this fact increased the blandness of her humor and she turned interestedly from her own reflection to the flying panorama of brown fields and villages. Presently she remarked,

"There are, vaguely, two daughters, I believe you said?"

Cousin Julia

"Exactly; I'm glad you recall it. I told you, of course, all about them before we started, but as it has amused you to pay no attention whatever to the whole thing I'm surprised that you do recall it. And there's nothing, by the way, in the least vague about them. They very substantially are, and have grown up and come out."

"Oh yes, I remember finding that so quaint."

"Why quaint? You were presented to society yourself, weren't you?"

"In Philadelphia, yes. But out here it seems, somehow—"

"Not in the least; it's done all over the place. Everybody does it."

"That makes it all the quainter, doesn't it?" said Violet with an engaging smile.

"Laugh all you want to, but it's on account of those girls that I expect Cousin Jim to help us."

"Because?"

"Because I fancy Cousin Julia expects them to do great things, and we might be useful. They'll be wanting to go to Europe next to splurge, and an Embassy is a very nice place to get a look at Paris or London from. Besides that, we're a purely social asset. They haven't many high lights in the background, you know."

"You speak, my dear, as if you were at least an Ambassador."

"Oh well," he replied, "a first secretary is a diplomat and that sounds well, and then you mustn't forget who *you* are."

Violet's lids drooped over her eyes, veiling their expression.

"I really shouldn't talk that way if I were you; you do that sort of thing quite badly."

Cousin Julia

Tillinghurst, who had been bending over his bag, straightened up, and taking a cigarette from his case fitted it into a meerschaum holder.

"I don't know what you mean, but for heaven's sake, Violet, don't be personal if you can't be agreeable," he retorted.

Tillinghurst was tall and rather beautifully built, and there was at first glance a certain youthful charm about his dark close-cropped head. It was marred, however, by a weak and selfish mouth, the mouth of a man who would bully, and could consequently be bullied. He left one, somehow, with the impression that he was older than he appeared to be, which was indeed the case.

Violet surveyed him for an instant in silence. Presently she remarked,

"But I should think the fact that you paid no attention to them till your father lost all his money might dissuade them from being generous."

"When people can get something they want out of you they don't care whether you like them or not. They'll be getting a return for their money or I shouldn't expect them to give it."

"We'll hope they see it that way."

"They do, or why should Cousin Julia have written us to come out?"

"I'm sure I never could imagine. Doubtless it was that. How soon do we arrive?"

"In about an hour, thank goodness."

"Will anyone meet us?"

"Don't think so. I implied in my letter that we didn't expect anyone, so of course they'll think it isn't the thing to do, and won't come."

"Don't be a snob, Robert."

Cousin Julia

"Well, upon my word, that from you of all people!"

"I'm a snob in the right way, dear, and you're not. We've been doing it so much longer than you have, you see."

For a moment Tillinghurst thought he was going to get very angry and then decided it was too much trouble. He was of the type that doesn't mind insults if they are in the family.

"I'm going out to get a drink," he remarked, slamming his bag shut and switching on the electric lights.

"Yes, do, and please put out the lights; I like looking at the country—your wonderful West that I've never seen. I feel," she added a trifle maliciously, "that it's going to be interesting."

"Look all you want to; I'm sure I don't want to see it," said Tillinghurst. "And besides," he added as he went out, "this isn't the West, you know; it's only the Middle West, and God knows nobody ever thought that interesting."

The door closed smartly, and Violet, with a sigh of relief, rearranged herself comfortably in her seat.

"No one knows how that man bores me," she thought, looking dreamily out of the window.

The autumn twilight was descending early over the stripped fields and brown orchards, and an occasional flash of mirrored sky showed some still lake holding the day's last glory in its crystal heart. The great express train, with only a warning scream as greeting, thundered through young, eager cities not yet grown up to it, and seemed bent on a final spectacular burst of speed now that the end of the journey was at hand. Then the outposts of the city began to appear, vast checkerboards of workmen's cottages, dreary and monotonous,

Cousin Julia

decaying cliffs of tenements and black rivers of shining steel rails that spread and converged and seemed to race with the train, and plunged with it at last into the smoky pandemonium of the station.

II

VIRGINIA BRADFORD and her father stood on the platform with their arms linked affectionately through each other's. Her eyes followed the easy movement of the train gliding to a stop.

"Do you think I'll like them, Daddy?"

"Couldn't say, Virgie. Don't tell your mother I said so, but I never could bear this boy as a youngster."

The girl giggled sympathetically. There were many confidences of this kind between her and her father.

"We'll probably both hate him. And Mother will love him," she added.

"You shouldn't say that, Virgie. Your mother will think what's right about him, I daresay."

"There they are now," Virginia exclaimed, not noticing the reproof. She found her father illogical at times. "I'm sure it is—she's the only young, stylish one there. Come on, Dad!" she added, pulling him forward.

Tillinghurst, in the meantime, had caught sight of them and came up with his hand outstretched.

"How are you, Cousin Jim," he exclaimed. "I should have known you anywhere!" He shook hands with Virginia, too, and looked at her a second time. Beauty was always interesting to Tillinghurst.

They then turned of one accord to Violet. The older man approached and took her hand a little awkwardly, and after hesitating a moment, he leaned forward and kissed her.

CASSIA JAMES

"How different all this is!" she thought anxiously as she looked for her book in the library.

"Wherever that is not in order," she said, remembering after describing a search and returning home. "But we thought it would be the best to get your money all ready." She took a small bundle from under her bed and walking quickly to her room she went for the key out of the window, looking in her pocket and thinking.

III

THE Bradfords lived in a hideous red brick house. It stood on a knoll in the high residence district of the city and was commonly pointed out as "one of our finest homes." Domes and towers and an occasional turret or spire lent irrelevant variety to its outline, and stained glass windows of unpleasing hues enlivened its façade. A graveled carriage drive led up to and from the entrance in a semicircle. There was a great deal of close-clipped lawn where round beds of geraniums flourished in summer, and a large and very bad bronze stood in the center of a perennially dry fountain. The interior of the house had recently been done over by a decorator and the taint of commercial home-beautifying was all-pervasive. Too much ingenuity in the way of electric lights, too many baronial touches, too much choosing of an oil painting to match a piano cover, and the horribly labored note of intimacy in the informal rooms were some of the trade-marks left by the designer. There are doubtless some, a very few, interior decorators who can create, with the fairy wand of taste and plenty of money, a beautiful and pleasing home to order, but one of these rare princes of his profession had not fallen to Mrs. J. C. Bradford when she remodeled her house. It had its one real glory, however—the splendor, which is a national one, of perfect, superlative, superhuman plumbing. Every individual member of the family, every guest or possible guest, had his own white-tiled, paradisaical bathroom.

Cousin Julia

J. C. Bradford's rise to fortune was not sudden as those things go in America, but the change in his surroundings had been. Many years had gone by and many hundreds of thousands were piled up before Mrs. J. C. realized their wealth and its potentialities. The girls could remember as young children the small frame house where Louise was born. It stood, surrounded by a shady yard, on an unfashionable thoroughfare, and was lighted by gas and heated by glowing coal stoves. The dining room harbored a sewing machine and a rocking chair and the dinner table wore at breakfast and between meals a Turkey red substitute for the white tablecloth. The girls ate from it bread spread with New Orleans molasses, when they returned afternoons from the public kindergarten, and many brown stains appeared during the week and darkened its splendor. The best remembered feature of the living room was the great worn easy chair. It had seemed colossal to the children, and planted squarely under the blazing Welsbach light, was occupied during the day by the large gray cat (there had been an unending succession of loud-purring gray cats—or was it always the same one?), and during the evening by father and the evening paper. He read this exhaustively and in unbroken silence, while his wife sewed and the girls did what little lessons they had to learn. There were seldom visitors and the evening ended at nine or half past. Everybody went upstairs at the same time, but their father's light was always streaming through their half opened door when the girls went to sleep.

When they moved to the big house a great deal of the old furniture went with them and more of the same kind was bought and added to it—shiny golden oak sets, highly ornamental rocking chairs, and a few chem-

Cousin Julia

ical mahogany parlor pieces that looked as though they had been dipped in poison. Not the least beloved of those earlier possessions had been the enlarged photo portraits—by just which horrible method they were made is unimportant—of each member of the family. What slight resemblance the likeness bore to the sitter was mainly gruesome, as it looked as he or she might have done when greatly frightened or shortly after having committed a crime. However, these, like all the rest, had gone down before the scythe of the decorator who had appeared several years later. His entrance into her scheme of things and the sending of the girls to a fashionable boarding school marked the third and most significant stage of Mrs. Bradford's evolution.

"Julia's no fool," had always been a stock phrase in the Watts family when Julia was a girl at home and events had so far proved that Julia unquestionably was not. One overruling passion had had a wonderfully disciplining effect upon all her faculties. They became like trained soldiers, answering to a man in any and all circumstances to the call of the commander. Such an army makes a very efficient power and the united and coöperative faculties under the command of her general in chief, ambition, made Mrs. Bradford a very efficient person.

What she would have been without her tyrant is impossible to say, because, like those parasite vines in tropic forests that fasten upon a tree and by the time they have slowly devoured it have become the tree themselves, she lived only as a part of her overmastering inclination. To become a personage, a great lady of the city where she was born and that she had seen grow from a village to a large and important capital, had become her purpose. She intended her daughters to

Cousin Julia

make brilliant matches, to take their place socially with and above the handful of people who had always been considered, since the early days, the aristocracy of the town. She had systematically climbed by all the approved methods, charities, church work, clubs, lectures, musicales, and lastly and most importantly, by her daughters. Rich, well brought up, beautiful, and beautifully gowned young girls in a city no larger than theirs and as loosely organized socially as most American cities are could not fail to become identified with all the desirable young persons of their generation if they were properly managed, and the Bradford girls were properly managed. In fact they were so much a part of the young gayety of society that it never occurred to them that technically they did not belong so much as the girls whose mothers had been enjoying the same pleasures a generation before. Of course, aside from the technicality they *did* belong and were entirely one with their contemporaries in charm, intelligence, and innate refinement. There were long lines of plain but very solid and virtuous forbears back of both James Bradford and Julia Watts. These local distinctions are sometimes involved, but to Americans—especially provincial Americans—they are very real. They were to Mrs. Bradford. She realized that she had gone far but now she wanted more than just equality, she desired supremacy.

IV

THE night of their arrival the Tillinghursts were taken at once to a comfortable guest suite and told that Mrs. Bradford desired Mrs. Tillinghurst not to hurry as dinner would not be served till she was ready.

"No meeting us at the door in the good old-fashioned way for Cousin Julia," Bob remarked when they were alone. "She's doing it up in style."

"Or what she imagines to be the style," said his wife, carelessly unpinning her veil. She was the type of woman who wore veils well.

"I dare say she reads about the way people like—well, like you, Violet—do things—"

"And then gets them all wrong," Violet finished for him. They both laughed, but she added, "Oh, don't let's be so detestable!"

"I'm glad you included yourself for once, old girl," Bob said, giving her a friendly squeeze as he went into his room. He was really fond of his wife, and immensely proud of her, and he seldom dwelt on their differences. A good many husbands and wives compromise as easily as they quarrel, especially when the lack of understanding of the one is met by the total indifference of the other.

When the Tillinghursts went downstairs, they found Cousin Julia waiting for them in the library. It was her favorite room, and although she never read, she liked the looks of the long shelves filled with uncut

Cousin Julia

standard works. She stood by the massive table with her head well up and her chin thrust slightly forward, and she tapped lightly on the table top with her eye-glasses. It was in this position that the family best knew Mother. Of medium height and rather stout, her face seemed disproportionately thin, and the humorless gray eyes, narrow mouth, and pointed nose slightly red at the end, were all intensely characteristic. Certain people express themselves so much more inevitably in their physique than others, and she was of that type.

Somewhere in the background loomed her husband, his tall thin figure indistinct in the shadows. He disliked standing up and above all he loathed shaded lights, so much so that he spent many of his evenings at the office where the lidless electric globes and the swivel chair were reminiscent of the worn and gas-lit radiance of happier days. He never visited the club, of which he had been made a member several years before, and where he had become in a queer silent way rather a favorite, except on Saturday nights, when he spent the evening there and played a notably good game of poker. His hair and short, square-cut beard were very gray and he seemed many years older than his wife.

Mrs. Bradford welcomed Bob and Mrs. Tillinghurst calmly, and gave each in turn, as she took their hands, a look of intent scrutiny. This scrutinizing glance was a characteristic of hers, as was standing up, and, like all of her few characteristics, was mostly a habit. It is doubtful whether she saw very far into the people she thus examined, or whether she cared to, for if she searched at all it was for but one thing: in what way could they further her cause? She was not distinguished looking but her manner conveyed perfect

Cousin Julia

self-satisfaction and a supreme self-reliance that were, somehow, compelling.

Violet felt impressed by her, without knowing quite why, but she found herself somewhat at a loss. She was about to turn for relief to Cousin Jim, when Mrs. Bradford drew her back into her sphere.

"I'm glad to have you both with me," she said in her slightly high-pitched voice, "and," turning to Violet, "you made a great impression on my girl. They're both upstairs prinking right now, to do you honor."

"If your other daughter is as pretty as the one I saw she needn't do much prinking, Cousin Julia."

"Do you think so indeed?" Mrs. Bradford remarked with pleasure. "Well, most people do think Louise is prettier."

No one spoke for a moment or sat down, though Cousin Julia was the only one who seemed quite at ease standing thus in silence, and then light footsteps and the rustle of young silken garments announced the arrival of the girls. They seemed very fresh and lovely as they fluttered into the room with a self-possession by no means wholly assumed, for they were not without the self-confident poise that seems to be the birthright of American youth. Louise, a pink and white creature with the accompanying gold hair and sea blue eyes, was younger than her sister and would doubtless be considered by most people the prettier of the two; but Violet found Virginia's appearance far more attractive. Her lips were red and deeply curved and above her gray eyes rimmed with black one long eyebrow was penciled higher than the other. She was vivid and significant. She was like a bright, dark flower on a slender stalk, and like a slender plant she would sway to the breezes and storms of her moods,

Cousin Julia

would darken or glow to their passing sunlight or shadow. Such was the impression, sudden and complete, Violet received from the girl as she entered the somberly lighted room with her sister, and it always remained with her.

Meanwhile Louise was speaking,

“Did you have a tiring trip, Cousin Violet?” she observed in the politest of tones, and Virginia exclaimed, “Aren’t we ever going to eat, Mother? I’m starved!”

“We’ve only been waiting for you girls,” her mother answered. “Come along, now, it’s all ready.”

The dining room was a big, square apartment, deeply and oppressively red, of a peculiarly sinister shade, with great sideboards and serving tables of highly veneered mahogany. The illumination issued from beneath a globe suspended over the table. It was made of red, blue, and green glass and sent a merciless blaze down over the table while diffusing a weird twilight throughout the rest of the room.

At the table Violet found herself seated next to Mrs. Bradford, with Virginia and Tillinghurst on either side of the host. Louise gave herself with great dignity to the task of entertaining Bob, and Virginia chatted with, or rather to, her father. She always had a great deal to say to him, and he listened to it all with great interest, seldom making a remark himself. Mrs. Bradford never talked unless she had something definite to say, when she became surprisingly and rather suddenly voluble. At present she was silent. Violet listened to the others a moment and then turned to Cousin Julia.

“Cousin Julia, your daughters have such attractive voices and pronunciations. It’s a great charm.”

“Yes, it’s an accident in a way. I never thought

Cousin Julia

anything about that as a young person—not so very many people out here did in those days—but when I took the girls down East to school it came to me all of a sudden. I sat talking to the head woman and wondering all the time why she was charming. Dear me, she was a homely woman! Then it struck me it was her voice, and I interrupted her then and there and said, ‘I don’t care what else you teach them, but you keep them right here till they talk like you do.’ She said she would and she did.”

Violet felt there was something distinctly revealing in this disclosure which Mrs. Bradford made with unsmiling directness, glancing now at Violet, now at the different individuals grouped about her, with eyes which, one felt sure, had never twinkled in their lives. Violet was about to express her approval of the incident but Mrs. Bradford interrupted her; she was not a good listener except when obtaining information.

“Where were you educated, Violet?”

“I—oh, partly in Philadelphia and partly in France and England.”

“You speak French, then, very well?”

“Yes, fairly so.”

“That’s good, especially for a diplomat’s wife. I wish the girls—Virginia does well enough, but Louise—!” She shook her head at her younger daughter who dimpled at her alluringly.

“Well, I’m not a diplomat’s wife, anyway.”

“Oh, but wouldn’t you love to be!” broke in Virginia. “I would.”

Then J. C. spoke, precluding his remark with the slight husky cough of the self-conscious person who converses very little.

“How do you like your line of business, Bob?”

Cousin Julia

"I don't suppose it seems much of a business to a man of real affairs like you, Cousin Jim," the young man answered, glancing at his wife, "but it's a fascinating life—that is, if you like meeting people"—he turned to Mrs. Bradford—"interesting people of the world—and Violet and I do."

Mrs. Bradford nodded, looking at him in her intent way.

"But what do you *do*?" pursued Cousin Jim with unusual loquacity. "There's always a special envoy when anything comes up, as far as I can see."

As Bob outlined his duties to Mr. Bradford, Violet sat silent, thinking of her hostess. She was without doubt extremely capable, had brought up her children admirably, and was, Violet could see from the excellence of the cooking and the clean orderliness of the household, a good housekeeper. All this, however, indicated commonplace enough qualities; indeed Mrs. Bradford manifested none that were not, and yet she did not impress Violet as being a commonplace woman. Violet wondered why she did not. As she sifted her impression, however, she could find nothing more distinctive than a certain hardness, purposeful and pervasive, which she could not explain. One felt that Julia Bradford would do anything she believed to be desirable, but that she could never be hoodwinked, persuaded, or forced to do anything she did not, after deliberation, wish to do. What she might do for them was, felt Violet, who understood her less well than did Tillinghurst, extremely problematic. In any case it would be an agreeable enough visit. The girls were lovely young creatures and the house, though ugly, was comfortable. Violet liked good food and it was very good here and served with painstaking correct-

Cousin Julia

ness by two capable Swedish maids in black uniforms.

When the dinner came to an end, Mrs. Bradford said they would have coffee in the other room. Her husband threw her an appealing glance but she merely said, "You come along, J. C., and Virginia will play for us." As they were leaving the table the shrill summons of the telephone called Louise from the room.

"You can have all the company you want, Lucy," Virginia called after her, "but if anyone wants to call on me I won't see them."

"Why not?"

"I don't know; don't feel like it, I suppose."

"The house is just run over with young men," Mrs. Bradford exclaimed proudly to Violet. "The girls are so popular. This is their room," she added as they entered an agreeable sitting room with a grand piano in one corner. "They always have their friends in here, to themselves."

Violet had had a very much chaperoned youth, but she knew how, in the average American home, mothers carefully avoid interfering with their children's pleasures.

"That's very considerate, I'm sure," she answered vaguely. "Is the season here very gay? Are there many large parties?" Violet arranged herself daintily in a small, straight armchair and looked up at Mrs. Bradford, who stood by a table, tapping on it, as usual, with her glasses.

"Yes, I should think there are," she replied, gazing approvingly at the younger woman who, without being a beauty, had a harmonious finished look and an air of distinction to which Mrs. Bradford was particularly sensitive. "Seems to me there are no end of them. Four cotillions given by the bachelors' club and any

Cousin Julia

number of private balls. I'm going to give a dance for the girls later on. You must help me with it."

"I'd love to—if it isn't too much later," Violet replied. She was conscious of Cousin Julia's approval and it gave her a pleasurable thrill, as admiration, of which she was inordinately fond, always did.

The coffee made its appearance, and presently Virginia, quite as a matter of course—it was evidently her custom after dinner—went to the piano and began to play. Bob, who loved music, sat down near her and her father closed his eyes in anticipation. Cousin Julia and Violet, indifferent to the playing, were both busy with their own thoughts and sipped their coffee in silence.

Virginia used no notes but she played fluently and well. Whether it was improvisation or passages from the classics, there was a sureness of understanding and a depth and variety of feeling which showed the rare quality of real musicianship. She sang too, a little, some preposterous old songs her father loved and to which he occasionally hummed a discordant accompaniment. The music only ended with the sound of young voices on the porch and the peal of the electric bell.

"Come, J. C.," admonished Mrs. Bradford. "The girls' company has come."

V.

VIOLET, with Louise and Virginia on either side of her, sat on the broad, back seat of the Bradford carriage the day after her arrival, being sedately propelled along the city's inevitable show street, in this case a lake boulevard of unquestionable beauty. The carriage Mrs. Bradford had not yet brought herself to part with, despite the nascent enthusiasm for automobiles, an enthusiasm that already foreshadowed their incredible future. She had not been able to part with it because she remembered it as it had looked waiting for her that first time before her door, a transcendent possession, deeply, pervasively satisfying. Such a deep-seated, shining thing it was, with its bombastic horses, so smooth and fat that they seemed almost naked in their prancing elegance! The acuteness of the pleasure she had tasted in that first moment had not, of course, lasted, but the memory of it did, and it enveloped the equipage with a fictitious grandeur which remained for some time after the changing fashion would otherwise have induced the forward looking Julia Bradford to discard it.

It was a November day, the last of the month, a level day, silently cold and lighted by a dull, orange ball of a sun which moved, veiled in mist, across the gray sky. Women went about in new glossy furs, and every *débutante* blessed with a suitor wore a gigantic yellow or red chrysanthemum tucked into the neat front of her tailored frock. Louise and Virginia were so

Cousin Julia

adorned—the wearing of bouquets, the larger the better, upon all occasions, was a great fashion in Columbia in those days—and had tried to press a large, mahogany-colored cabbage on Violet. This, however, was declined.

The real glory of the Middle West, its spirited, golden Indian Summer, she had missed. There seems to be some special magic in the yellow sunlight of those cool October days, and in the chill, blue mists that evening hangs like a spell over the stubble fields and the still Northern lakes. And the smell of burning leaves is threaded through their beauty, a beauty like that of martial music, daring and touched with a thrilling sadness. Perhaps, to love the fall, one must be young, and able to match its splendid melancholy with the mysterious expectancy of hoping youth, or perhaps it is temperamental, a disposition one is born and dies with, and those who do love it love it wistfully and poignantly as no other season is loved. Its sumptuous moment had now, however, passed. The flaming maple woods were tarnished and November was darkening into winter.

Violet was enjoying herself. The sting of the dry cold air on her cheeks pleased her as did the beauty of the two young girls whose vivid faces impressed her sharply above the gray harmonies of the day.

“We must be sure and be back by tea time—Liebe Frau is coming, you know,” Virginia observed.

“Heavens, what a nuisance! Of course we won’t get nearly out to the lake then,” Louise replied in a martyred tone.

“Who is Liebe Frau?” Violet inquired.

“Oh, she’s a wonderful person! A great friend of mine,” Virginia exclaimed.

Cousin Julia

Louise gave a faint sniff.

Her sister turned on her impatiently. "What are you doing that for?" she demanded. "You've always pretended to be crazy about her, and now you're trying to make Violet think she's an old bore. I think you're horrid."

Without turning her head Louise glanced sideways at her sister with an expression of hurt surprise.

"I do like her," she answered politely, "but I don't see why our drive should be spoiled because she's always coming to tea. Why don't you get out and go home by yourself?"

"She isn't always coming to tea, and today she's coming specially to meet Violet. You want to meet her," she said, turning to the older woman, "don't you?"

Violet was pleasantly enthusiastic and Virginia said triumphantly,

"There, you see? You just wanted to be disagreeable."

"Not at all. Of course she had to say that but I know she wanted to take a long drive. She said so. She can meet Frau von Ernst any time if you insist on having her."

Virginia's quick temper was rising.

"Insist on having her! You ought to be proud of having her come—she wouldn't if she knew what a hypocrite you are—hypocrite!"

Louise at this insult merely raised her eyebrows in silent scorn, and further enraged Virginia.

"Oh," she exclaimed in a high temper, "I despise people who are awfully nice to people and then the minute the other people aren't there——"

Violet permitted herself to smile at this slightly

Cousin Julia

repetitious monologue, and Virginia, perceiving the smile, came to a sudden stop. She was being ridiculed, that was apparent. It seemed to her that her temporary hatred of Louise must now include Violet. She herself had felt just then that she was becoming rather involved, but the strength of her provocation, and the nobility of the sentiments she was trying to express should have spared her ridicule. Her great gray-black eyes sent a message of further violence to Louise, and the habitually clear pallor of her skin slowly crimsoned. Louise, while seeming, curiously, to enjoy, in a silky way, rousing it, quite thoroughly understood her sister's temper, and feared an awkward moment. She changed the subject, and, mindful ever of appearances, sustained a bland conversation during the drive back, acting elaborately as if nothing had happened.

Virginia's fit of temper persisted as long as it was bottled up and when, upon their return, she and Louise went to their room to take off their wraps it immediately burst forth. Louise was an extraordinarily unsatisfactory person to quarrel with, as she seldom gave her antagonist the satisfaction of a retort, and there was about her an air of patient wonder that goaded fury to madness. So Virginia stamped her foot and made fierce verbal attack in unshared iniquity and then, about to burst into tears, she dashed into her bathroom and locked the door. It was the only place of her own that would lock, and turning on the water in the bathtub to drown the sounds of her woe, she wept. But Virginia's moods were always mercurial and she soon began to wonder what it was all about. The fact that she scarcely knew caused her to smile and then the storm was over. She turned off the

Cousin Julia

water and daubed her face with a wet towel to efface the ravages of her suffering, and returned to the world looking and feeling particularly radiant. She was always at her best after one of these outbursts. Her temper was explosive and her nervous energy excessive, so that a scene, often irrelevant and always short-lived, was an emotional necessity to Virginia. These singular manifestations were a mystery to her mother and sister, who could not, as they complained, see any sense to them.

When she went downstairs she found Louise and Violet sitting together near an open fire, with Louise primly ensconced behind the tea table. She looked very clean and proper and sweet in her fall costume of brown chiffon and velvet, fitting irreproachably over her rounded arms and breast, her fair hair neatly arranged, and bright and shining in the firelight. Virginia admired her sister immensely, finding herself plain and black in comparison, but she always had a perverse desire to stir up those placid depths and see what would come to the surface. She never saw. Just at present Louise was so unusually immaculate and Sainte Nitouche that Virginia surreptitiously made a face at her. She caught Violet's eye as she did so and they both laughed. Violet held out her hands to the young girl. "Come here, you lovely imp," she exclaimed smilingly, and Virginia went to her with a flattered feeling of companionship.

"Where is Mother, Lucy?" she inquired presently.

"At Mrs. Winfield Watson's. She wanted to take Violet, but Violet said afternoon teas were horrors and she never went to them."

Louise felt there was a great deal of chic to that idea and reserved it for future use. Her mother had

Cousin Julia

always resolutely attended all receptions, as she called them, and had anxiously kept count, each season, of the square white cards that arrived, to see that she had been omitted by none of the season's tea-givers.

"Come on and go with us to Mrs. Watson's dance tonight, Violet," said Virginia coaxingly. "It's a remnant of this afternoon dished up for the younger people. You'll be a great sensation."

"Oh do! I'd love to see you in a ball gown. You have such perfectly wonderful clothes and you wear them just right. I suppose it's because you're so petite and elegant," she added in her purring way—a great deal of Louise's flattery was genuine—"do come."

"No, I shall only go to your dance, my dears. By that time I shall have found out who the attractive men are, and can eliminate the bores."

"Does Cousin Bob dance?"

"Rather, if there are any sufficiently pretty women about. We never dance together—one doesn't somehow. I know of nothing less amusing than dancing with one's husband—it's like eating when you're not hungry."

The girls adored the flippant aphorisms Violet occasionally indulged in, and feeling her way of talking to be worldly in the extreme, resolved to imitate her as far as possible. Louise did so very successfully after a time, but Virginia could never imitate anyone or anything, nor could she acquire a pose though she yearned to have one. It seemed such a ready and safe thing to fall back on when one was embarrassed or self-conscious or any of the things one frequently was.

"I wonder why Liebe Frau doesn't come," she said

Cousin Julia

restlessly, and, always unable to remain long inactive, she got up and went to the piano.

"For heaven's sake don't play, Virgie. I get so sick of it all the time," Louise objected.

"All right, I won't," Virginia acceded with magnanimity. She turned to the window instead, and employed her energy in drumming on the pane.

"You haven't told me yet who she is," Violet reminded them.

"Oh, she's just an Italian lady who ran away when she was young and married a German, no Austrian, von Ernst, and they came here to live. She's old now. Virgie and she are great friends."

Louise's attitude toward Frau von Ernst was a peculiar one. As there was a strong subcurrent of sympathy between Mrs. Bradford and Louise, the girl may, without consciously realizing it, have caught the shade of a dissonance that existed in the relations of her mother and the other woman. While Frau von Ernst was an intimate of the household, coming and going freely when the family were alone and invited almost as a matter of course when there were guests, still she had really no close personal relationship with Mrs. Bradford. It was an acquaintanceship of long standing rather than a friendship and was maintained in spite of obvious incompatibility of temperament. And Louise, while she felt, as almost everyone did, the magnetic personality of Frau von Ernst, never gave her an unqualified affection. Meanwhile the afternoon waned and they had about decided that the visitor was not coming after all, when she appeared. She crossed the room quickly, a tall, rather majestic figure, wrapped in furs, and gave a hand to each of the girls.

"I am so sorry, children, to be as late as this. You

Cousin Julia

have waited tea too—but you will have to forgive me! This once, won't you? And you too, Mrs. Tillinghurst, must forgive me."

Violet, who had risen, took the slender, white hand held out to her, and the two women looked at each other with interest and approval. Each recognized in the other the indefinable quality of distinction.

"A woman of the world," was Violet's unspoken comment, and,

"*Une femme du monde,*" was Frau von Ernst's inward judgment of Violet.

But the resemblance ended there. They differed remarkably and the difference was perhaps in no way more subtly expressed than in their faces. Violet's appearance suggested a cameo, full of quality and a classic, delicate hardness. Frau von Ernst, on the other hand, possessed a singular fluidity of expression. Her features were strongly marked, almost stern, although it was the sternness, not of a lack, but rather of a superabundance of feeling, inexorably repressed. This intensity of spirit betrayed itself in her eyes. They were large and dark and full of a kind of flashing earnestness, and it was a restless spirit one divined, always searching, always trying to grow, perhaps not so much with life as above it.

Such qualities must carry their defects. If there was a lack of balance in such a face, it was inevitable, for the too earnest contemplation of things as they ought to be may destroy the ability to see things as they are. And yet, who has ever seen things as they are—with truth a fugitive down the ages, and poets and saints and cynics alike after her, pretty much in vain!

Frau von Ernst had in her many of the elements

Cousin Julia

of a saint, a modern, unorthodox saint, seeking, not redemption, but understanding.

Perhaps she was not without the accompanying flair for martyrdom. If she had her bed of cinders or her garment of sackcloth, she would spare herself none of their torment, yielding to it, not weakly, but with a fiery self-control. She seated herself.

Louise made the tea, and Virginia handed round the cakes and sandwiches, eating a great many of them herself. Twilight was deepening in the room, but the fire had been replenished and gave a pleasant illumination.

Violet, who had at first been attracted by Frau von Ernst and had felt that she would enjoy her visit, was beginning to be bored. The visitor was deliberately, it seemed to Violet, talking down to the girls, inquiring with great interest about their gayeties, laughing at their little gossip and their anecdotes of cutting dances and winning new admirers, and all that was very dull, and when she turned to her with the question—

“Have you heard Virginia play?” Violet was somewhat impatient.

“Oh, yes, yes indeed. She does nicely, so well for a young girl.”

The dark eyes of her interlocutor rested on her pensively for an instant. Then she said to Virginia:

“I have the Rachmaninoff now, Virginia; you must come soon and play it with me. We haven’t played together for so long.”

“I know, Liebe Frau, but I never have time any more.”

“Of course not. I’m glad you haven’t. You will be a musician all your life and a young girl only once.”

Cousin Julia

"Fortunately!" put in Violet. "Extreme youth is an inane period."

"Why, Violet, are we inane?" remonstrated Louise, dragging her words to the little singsong drawl she employed.

"Very," said Violet, smiling at her.

"Mrs. Tillinghurst is joking," said Frau von Ernst.

"Not at all! At eighteen you're neither fish, flesh, nor good red herring. You've lost the nice naïveté of childhood, and you haven't acquired the intelligence of maturity. I shall prefer you when you become red herring or black sheep or anything except—unripe peaches, let us say." Violet laughed at herself, "There's a mixing of metaphors to make a purist go mad!"

"Why not peach blossoms before the perfume has faded or the leaves begun to fall?" interpolated Frau von Ernst. "But, perhaps, Mrs. Tillinghurst, you care as little for flowers as you do for youth?"

"I do rather dislike them," Violet responded mischievously. Now that she was on what Bob called her "high horse" she might as well ride him hard: "If they have lots of perfume they sicken you, if they have none they bore you."

They all laughed. Frau von Ernst laughed too, but rather abruptly changed the subject.

"Where's your mother?" she inquired of Virginia.

"Oh, stupidly gone to one of those afternoon teas," quoted the acquisitive Louise.

The older woman heard her in some surprise. This was a new tone for Louise.

"Come, come, child," she said, "Mother doesn't do stupid things."

Cousin Julia

"Oh, but she does," put in Violet. "Almost everything everyone does is stupid. I sometimes think," she added, holding out her cup for more tea, "that the only alternative to doing stupid things stupidly, is to do naughty things nicely."

Frau von Ernst looked slightly displeased.

"You are young, dear Mrs. Tillinghurst, young enough to try to be cynical and that is stupid. But you will outgrow it."

Violet's amusement in the game of making phrases, careless phrases, but which were colored nevertheless by her point of view, suddenly ceased. She thought that she had been snubbed and was absurdly annoyed by it.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, "a real find! A person naïve enough to still use that ancient bugbear of a word, cynical! Frau von Ernst, you are younger than I!"

"If so, I am a more appropriate companion for young girls, perhaps."

It was a sharp answer, but Frau von Ernst—and perhaps it was one of her limitations—had a disproportionate dislike of flippancy. "I must go now, my dear," she said to Virginia, drawing her furs around her shoulders.

Virginia, protesting, rose to help her. Just then there was a gay rapping on the window before which the curtains had not been drawn, and two young faces were pressed against the glass and looked laughingly into the room. Louise and Virginia flew to open the door to them and a lively conversation ensued in the hall, disclosing the patent information that the visitors were going somewhere from somewhere else. They also declared that they could by no means think of going into the drawing room or remaining more than a limited

Cousin Julia

number of seconds. The result was that they all stood in the hall and giggled for twenty minutes, with fragments of conversation thrown in, until the arrival of Mr. Bradford put them to flight.

Meanwhile, Frau von Ernst had risen to go, but, after a moment's hesitation, she sat down again. She had found all her life that she attracted people, men and women alike, and—though it was an unrecognized vanity—the knowledge pleased her. Now, realizing that she had offended Violet, she succumbed to a quite unconscious desire to win her back. Moreover, as the subject was one of her hobbies, she wished to prolong the discussion.

"I have an old friend, Dr. Haslip," she said, "who tells me I have the hopeless defect of looking at things *au grand sérieux*, of taking myself, as you say here, too seriously." She smiled.

Violet was listening with a sort of patient indifference.

"He is fond of me, so it must be true. However, I shall never change." She paused.

"It's a quality," observed Violet, "which I'm afraid I don't share."

"Happily, if it's a defect. Very likely it is." There was a moment of silence. "But about young girls," she resumed, "I so strongly feel that there's a tone to be taken, an atmosphere—their atmosphere—to be observed. Of course, I'm a European, and I still think there are certain attitudes, like certain books, not quite *pour les jeunes filles*."

"Oh, the *jeune fille*!" Violet retorted. "Do you know where she is to be found nowadays? Certainly not in America, I should say, where girls go to indiscriminate matinées and read indiscriminately every-

Cousin Julia

thing they choose, from popular magazines to French novels!"

"I know, I know, it's all wrong. But even so, there are many natures which do not seem to absorb the evil of such things. Virginia is like that. However, that is beside the question."

Violet moved her chair further from the fire.

"I'm afraid I do not follow you. If Virginia can't absorb anything harmful, why take any particular attitude, why guard her, for instance, from what you chose to call my cynicism a while back?"

"Flippancy rather, and it seems to me that that is more dangerous to youth than anything else. Anything that attacked the innocence of her nature she would be proof against, but your flippancy attacks—well—her faith, perhaps, in life, puts ridicule in the place of reverence."

"Then you think life should be looked on reverently?" Violet's tone was pertly incredulous. Frau von Ernst did not answer and when she spoke again her voice was more earnest.

"Virginia admires you; she is impressionable and you will influence her. Don't let her suppose that life is as empty as a sucked egg, that its rewards are not worth its tragedies and that both are unimportant—in a word, what cynicism eternally implies, that it is not worth while—for it is." Her voice, and her large eyes, that seemed to be lighted from within, were full of depth and tenderness as she said this. Violet felt suddenly drawn to her again.

"You very much believe that, don't you, Frau von Ernst?"

"I've learned that it is true."

"And you are very fond of Virginia?"

Cousin Julia

"Yes!" the exclamation was hardly more than a sigh, "I love her."

The two women remained silent, listening to the laughter and sudden humming of tunes that came from the hall, making a lively staccato against the steady background of the December wind that mourned as it fled past the gables and domes of the Bradford architecture. Their conversation left Violet with a momentary realization of a void in herself that her own philosophies had in no way filled. She wondered if they were ever filled—those empty places. Not by the wearing of smart frocks, by eating, drinking, flirting, dancing and triumphing over the women of one's set, for she had tried all that. Then her mood swung back. At any rate, when one was doing those things, particularly flirting, there was little time to think of echoing vacancies of the soul. So it was high time they were on their way once more.

VI

BOB TILLINGHURST'S bringing up had been conducted chiefly by himself. His mother had died when he was a child and his father had always lived entirely in, and for, business, that curious superstructure of life which for many people is life, with, as in the case of Tillinghurst Sr., an ornamental façade of sports and a domestic background of clubs. To be the only son of a rich man is often supposed to be a dangerous bit of good fortune, and fraught with the potentialities of disaster, but whether it had had a detrimental effect on Bob's character is doubtful. He was cast in a small, concrete mold which allowed for neither shrinkage nor expansion. His desires had never been tumultuous, of aspirations he had none and his ambitions were few and well defined. These, so far, had been fulfilled. He had desired to become a diplomatist, and a post and the money to maintain him in it had been forthcoming. When he felt it was opportune and desirable to marry a pretty and above all socially prominent woman, his personal attractions and (especially) his money and prospects of a career procured him one. He liked to be received in the smartest houses, go to smart dinner parties, lounge in clubs and make mild love to pretty women and the gods had hitherto provided. But the gods provide far more lavishly on a large bank account than they do on the salary of a first secretary, so it was to be hoped that Cousin Jim would take his place among the deities, in

Cousin Julia

lieu of the impoverished Tillinghurst. It was also to be hoped that he would do it soon, for Bob was sick with ennui and longed to return to the boulevards and drawing-rooms of Paris, and Violet's temporary interest was waning.

Cousin Julia, though a very direct woman, was also deliberate and a week or more had passed before she indicated to Bob her awareness of the fact that they had something to say to each other. One day early in December when he was starting somewhat aimlessly for the club, where he usually spent the evenings now that it had grown too late for golf, Mrs. Bradford sent for him.

"Just going out?" she inquired. "Where to?"

"Nowhere, if you need me," was the reply. "I was going to the club to look at the papers and have a cocktail," he added perversely, not knowing whether she disapproved of them or not. As a matter of fact, she did disapprove of them in general but whether Bob took one or twenty was of complete unimportance to her. As it touched her purposes in no way, she scarcely noticed what he had said.

"All right, go along. I'm coming down town myself later; when I finish my errands I'll pick you up and we'll come home together."

Bob thanked her and spent the intervening time in a state of impatience. He wondered if he had guessed correctly in supposing what he had of her intentions toward them, and if so, how much, plainly speaking, she would be good for. He tried to plan what he would say if the subject did come up, but when she sent in for him an hour or so later, had been unable to think of any but the most inadequate remarks. He found her waiting for him on the sidewalk in front of the club.

Cousin Julia

"I sent the carriage away," she explained. "I am sick of sitting down. We'll walk home."

"Good idea," Bob replied. "Just the day for it."

This was scarcely sincere, as the cutting north wind swept the streets and Bob buttoned his fur coat tightly about his throat. Mrs. Bradford walked rapidly and enjoyed it and for a few moments neither spoke. The lights were being flashed on in all the business buildings and the streets were beginning to boil with the outcoming streams of human beings released from their day of work and imprisonment—clerks, salespeople, bookkeepers, men and women who were to become individuals again for the few evening hours, individuals with individual affairs—families, loves, hates and tempers—in a word, to become for a little while what they were intended to be, and everywhere they hurried, for they knew that the time was short.

Mrs. Bradford loved to visit the stirring, business heart of the city in her costly furs and gowns and, looking at the hurrying shabby workingwomen, shadows of what she might have been, remember that down here she was the consort of a king. This was as near to exaltation as she ever came. She felt it keenly to-day, but there was no emotion in her high and uninflected voice when she finally spoke.

"This is a wonderful town, Bob!"

"Civic pride, Cousin Julia?"

"Yes," she replied. "And more than that. I love it. I've seen it grow like wildfire these last twenty years and Jim's been a big part of it all. He's grown right with it and in it."

"He's a wonder," Bob observed.

"I don't ask anything more for myself," she went on, "than to live and die here, but then my life's half

Cousin Julia

over. It's the girls, Bob; their world mustn't be just the town they were born in."

"It needn't be, surely."

"No, but it's not ordinary travel I want for them. And anyone can globetrot." She interrupted herself to take a handkerchief from her sable muff and blow her thin nose. It was redder than usual with the cold. "You know they'll marry early, especially Louise—she's the type that does. Of course there are plenty of nice young men, good matches too, right here in town, but I'd like her—them—to have more choice."

"I know exactly what you mean, Cousin Julia, and they're both such beauties there's no telling what they wouldn't do in the *grand monde*, as Violet would say." There was a pause, then Bob resumed, "It would be nice for them to visit us in Paris or London if I were only sure of keeping on in the service."

"Aren't you sure?"

"No, it's an expensive thing and Father's been awfully hard hit by this last legislation. It may be only temporary but for the next two or three years, if not much longer, it will be a mighty close shave. Hadn't you heard?"

"Oh, one hears so much. I didn't know whether to believe it or not."

"It's true all right."

They walked on in silence for a time. Presently she remarked,

"You and your father are just about Jim's nearest relatives, Bob."

The young man nodded.

"Why don't you let him help you out for, say, three years? It's only temporary."

"But——"

Cousin Julia

"I don't know just how those things are managed but I should think that if you once dropped out of your profession it might be hard to get back in."

"That's just it. You're a corker, Cousin Julia, but such generosity is really too much. I don't think either Violet or I could feel that we ought to accept it."

"Call it a loan, boy, and say no more about it. I'll fix it up for you and Violet and I will talk about the details. No," she laid her hand for a moment on his arm, "I don't want to hear any more objections. It's all settled—and about the girls, I guess we understand each other, Bob?"

"Yes."

It was astonishing what sincerity rang in their voices and, though each knew just when the other was lying, what strong trust and sympathy they mutually felt. It was nearly dark and they walked on more quickly. The wind had died away and a few soft flakes of early snow were floating downward, glistening like white jewels when they traversed the glaring zone of the street lamps, and settling gently, a palely glittering shroud, on the bare twigs and withered blades of grass. In the distance the Bradford house glowed like a great jack-o'-lantern, invitingly warm and cheerful.

Something in the purple stillness of the night, with its blazing stars, its white snowflakes falling driftingly with the poignant silence of a petal that loosens from a flower and drops, and its thrill of frost, wrought a magic which even touched these two, now that their bargaining was at an end. Their stride lengthened and they kept step rhythmically. This keen, frozen beauty seemed to hold some promise for them, some

Cousin Julia

cosmic knowledge of their hearts' desires and will to give it to them.

Glowing, and spangled with snow, they reached home. The bright doorway was open to receive them and they entered the house, carrying with them the breath of approaching winter.

VII

THERE was a general scattering that evening after dinner. Bob went to the club to see the New York papers and Mrs. Bradford was chaperoning a theater party for the girls. Louise and Virginia, youthfully beautiful in respective gowns of blue and pink chiffon, were pleasantly insistent that Violet should go with them. She refused, and they forgot their disappointment when the time came to wrap themselves in their warm, gay party cloaks, similarly cut and similarly foaming into crests of swan's-down about their young faces, and be off with their portentously clad mother—two flowery pleasure craft in tow of an armored cruiser. Mrs. Bradford wore London gray, shimmering and beaded and with an earnestly veiled décolletage. She bared her daughters' shoulders entirely after the dictates of fashion, but hers never achieved an emancipation her own youthful tradition had not included.

Violet, glad of the relaxation of the empty house, moved tranquilly about her room, slightly increasing by a touch here, a readjustment there, the exquisite neatness that always surrounded her, inspecting piles of scented and beribboned underwear and glancing at herself in mirrors from under arched eyebrows when she passed them. She always dressed her hair high and frequently paused to run the brush over it, where it rose glossy and almost golden from the slender nape of her neck to the crown of her small, erect head.

Cousin Julia

She had some letters to answer, and taking them and a book she was reading in a desultory way, she went into the small upstairs library at the end of the hall. Here she came upon J. C. He was sitting in one corner in an armchair that seemed too small for him, reading Parkman's "History of the Oregon Trail." His long legs in striped trousers which were as always, owing to his leanness, too wide, and his large feet in square-toed boots, stuck straight out in front of him, and he held between his teeth a half-smoked cigar which had gone out. Violet had supposed herself to be alone in the house and so, doubtless, had Cousin Jim or he would have kept himself with his book and his cigar well behind the closed door of his own room. But now, being fairly caught, he nodded at her amiably and, laying down his book, braced himself for any conversational assault that might impend. Violet smiled at him reassuringly. She had grown to be rather fond of him and she was full of tact. Pulling a low armchair round facing the fire with its back to him, she sat down.

"I hope my reading here won't disturb you, Cousin Jim," she said, and opened her book. The quiet of the room was restored. At first Cousin Jim could not quite free himself of the uneasy feeling that if he was to remain this way long with Bob's lively young wife something, he didn't know just what, was probably expected of him. But her persistent silence, and the reassuring back of the little chair turned toward him so resolutely, carried conviction, and he soon became as comfortable as though he were alone. They read together companionably for some time.

Violet's book failed to interest her and she selected one of her letters for reperusal. It was written in

Cousin Julia

French and covered many pages of thin foreign paper. She read it with absorbed interest. Full of the gossip of London and Paris, with pages of amusing comment on people and things and books, it took her back to her lamented little salon in the rue de Grenelle. When she had read the last paragraph, she looked reflectively into the fire, still holding the page in her hand.

So [he had written] almost as soon as you get this, I shall be in America. Will you be in New York, or must I go to Philadelphia to see you? I shall have a few weeks before going on to San Francisco, and of course you will be gracious enough to allow me to see something of you both—the friends I look forward most to meeting in America. I expect Bob's leave will be up before long and you will both be starting back to France. To France! Just the name, now while I am still here, gives me an emotion when I remember that I have resolved to spend six months away from her. We French are really absurd. But to San Francisco! On the revolving globe in my library here, it is at an unimaginable distance. Does one really get from Paris to San Francisco, and then, wonder of wonders, does one ever get back? How absurd this sounds to you I can quite realize, for of course distance does not exist for Americans. No place is remote enough; you come into the world with *le flair du Pullman*. (You see, "Pullman" has already become part of my vocabulary.) But as for me, behold me already homesick, and scared and thrilled with expectancy on the threshold of your new and wonderful country.

F. DE L.

P. S. I am going first to the Hollisters'. Address me there, as I do not at the moment recall the name of my bank.

Violet, still meditative, gathered the sheets together, and put them in their envelope. "I have an idea," she murmured to herself half aloud.

Cousin Julia

"Eh, what's that?" exclaimed J. C. "What did you say?"

"Only that I have an idea, Cousin Jim. I don't wonder you jumped."

He closed his book, carefully placing a match between the pages to mark the place and then turned the dead cigar round several times between his teeth.

"Cousin Jim, did you make your money on inspiration or hard work?"

"Inspiration?" he questioned.

"Yes, acting on impulse."

"Well," he said, slowly, his deep-set eyes twinkling, "I've lost a good bit of money on inspiration, but I've made an awful lot on hard work." There was a pause. "Still," he went on, "impulses are all right too, I guess. You can't always afford to overlook 'em."

He looked at her mildly over his spectacles. He was vaguely conscious of something about her rather remote from money in the making. And yet, she suggested, if not money, at least always having had it. It was inconceivable to him to think of her without the disposal of money. He wondered about them now. Tillinghurst, Sr., had had a pretty hard blow in the spring, he knew. J. C. felt that he liked Violet—admired her. Her voice was so quiet, and she was so womanly—or was feminine a better word for her?—so feminine and youthful in appearance. He thought that if Bob cared to go to work, to take a man's job, he'd be glad to arrange—

Just then Bob came into the room. He strode in, handsome in his way, for all of his bad mouth, dark and rather irritatingly debonair. He said "hello" in a loud voice. J. C. nodded a response, but he got up

Cousin Julia

and left. He really couldn't like Bob. He would get him a job but he didn't like him.

"What on earth," said Bob, when they were alone, "were you doing in here with the old man?"

"I came in to write," she replied, "but he was sitting near the desk and I didn't want to disturb him."

"Humph! Fat chance I'd have of not being disturbed!"

"You're a very different person from Cousin Jim."

"I should hope so!"

"Should you?"

That it should be a question was, he felt, faintly unflattering in intention.

"You wouldn't have married me if I hadn't been," he retorted.

"True," she murmured sweetly, with an acquiescence that enhanced the irrelevancy of her previous lightly implied disparagement.

But Bob, insensitive as usual, threw himself into a chair by the fire and lit a cigarette. When he was in a good humor he was not easily ruffled, and tonight his complacency was extreme. He shoved his hands into his coat pockets and settled deeply into his chair. He was delighted with his interview with Mrs. Bradford, and felt that their good fortune in getting her help was entirely due to his cleverness and foresight. He turned suddenly to Violet.

"By the way, old girl," he observed, "your enthusiasm over what I've done for us isn't going to hurt you any."

She raised her eyes to him, delicately contemplative.

"The trouble with you, Vi," he went on, "is that you're too darned unappreciative."

"Sorry," she replied, with her reserved, youthful

Cousin Julia

smile. "You've been Napoleonic, really. 'And, Bob," she added more seriously, "I thought this evening of something that I believe will please Cousin Julia and show her that we can be useful."

He glanced at her inquiringly.

"Lorme is coming to America, you know. I dare say he's in New York now and I've decided to ask him out here."

His gaze sought hers, surprised, doubting.

"But," he objected at last, "he wouldn't come." His conviction grew. "What on earth would he want with a pokey town in the Middle West? Of course he won't come."

"I think," said Violet, "that he will."

Tillinghurst turned slowly back to the fire.

"It would certainly please the old lady," was his final comment. "She'd hate having a real Marquis to hang on some of these local dowagers, I don't think!"

"Bob," said his wife distastefully, "your slang is becoming unbearable!"

VIII

FÉLIX DE LORME was fundamentally and essentially French, though his quite perfect English gave him a veneer of cosmopolitanism. He had, it is true, one British grandmother, his father's mother having been a languid and rather beautiful Irishwoman from whom he had inherited nothing but a certain warm and vibrant quality of voice, which lent to even his least intentioned remarks a poignancy he rather deplored. An intimate knowledge of English, begun in the nursery and amplified and completed during several years of English schooling, had given not the slightest Anglo-Saxon twist to his imagination or color to his personality, and he was as entirely Latin as the Lormes, with their original dash of Spanish, had been two hundred years before. He had traveled somewhat, having seen, as Frenchmen of his class do, Algiers, and much here and there of Europe—most of the Capitals and watering places, shooting fastnesses in Austria and of course the Scottish moors. And now he had come to America, brought there, curiously enough, by business.

The former Marquis, his father, had betrayed the traditional gambling spirit of his house by turning from the baccarat and roulette of his forbears to the hitherto untried wheel of American mining stocks. These had proved far less amusing and infinitely more ruinous. He died quite suddenly in the midst of the chaos they wrought in his affairs, assuring his son

Cousin Julia

that had he not died of worry and disappointment, ennui must certainly have slain him, and begging the young man to observe the disaster attendant upon an aristocrat engaging in business. Félix and his mother lived very comfortably during the period of mourning on the uncertainty that enshrouded their financial state. When this at last was removed it was found that steps would have to be taken. Their assets proved to consist almost entirely of numerous documents, engraved, stamped, signed and sealed with gold seals or red wax and emanating rather unanimously from San Francisco or thereabouts, and a forlorn hope was entertained that something might come of it all, if, as Micawber would say, someone were "on the spot." Hence the transatlantic and transcontinental pilgrimage rather reluctantly engaged upon by the young Marquis.

He had been in New York for something like a week when Violet's letter came to him.

You and your countrymen all come over [she wrote] to learn what there is to know of America and Americans, and then confine your investigations to the cosmopolitan potpourri of New York and Newport or the whirlwind individuality of San Francisco. But places like *this* are the real America and a short visit will enlighten and amuse you—you with your eternal curiosity about people. This, I suppose, is America at its best and dullest. However, there are lots of pretty girls about and you will no doubt be fêted and dined and danced and probably angled for, which you will enjoy, and you will incidentally see me and Bob, who are still here but sailing thrice gladly for Paris in a fortnight.

"I wonder," Lorme asked himself, laying down his letter at this point, "what Violet has in that handsome little head of hers just now." For that she had other than her alleged reasons for inviting him to visit

Cousin Julia

her husband's cousins in Columbia he did not doubt. He knew, with perfect French lucidity, that she did not in the least care about his or anyone's else sight-seeing or any other activity except in so far as it concerned her and he wondered in just what way this unexpected excursion into the Middle West on his part might do so. That, unable herself to be in New York, it was merely an effort on her part to bring him to her side he was not fatuous enough to suppose, although, with a certain analytical impartiality that was also French, he had allowed himself to consider even that. On the whole his curiosity was aroused. He read the letter once or twice and, after some hesitation, decided to do as she suggested. It would only be an interruption, not a deviation, from his journey across the continent and he was far from averse to seeing Violet again. She had always attracted him.

Occasionally, in her most disillusioned moments, Violet wondered whether Bob did not realize that he owed his smartest Continental friends and his membership in their desirable clubs to the fact that his wife was very charming and something of a coquette. Like many women of her class, American women, she was fundamentally cold, but she liked men, and above all, liked to attract them. She and Lorme, in their flirtatious badinage, just dallied upon the borderland and she never failed to amuse him. He liked her detachment. It was tantalizing, and, he believed, safe.

All in all, after thinking it over, he felt that he would like to join the Tillinghursts; besides, to be made one, as she had said, of a middle class, Middle Western and wholly American family for a week would be a novel experience. So a telegram soon followed his letter of acceptance, announcing the date of his arrival.

IX

BY Mrs. Bradford considered providential good luck, it was to be the day before the ball. The girls were greatly thrilled. Traveling nobility seldom found occasion to visit that community of purely commercial activity and they had never met a titled foreigner.

"Is he handsome and young?" demanded Virginia.

"Is he rich, Violet?" inquired Louise.

"He's fairly young, I suppose, though in experience and culture, civilization you might call it, he is old compared to—well, comparatively speaking. And he is extremely handsome if you like the Latin type, which, of course you know nothing about. What else—oh, rich? No, he is far from rich. There, my dears, anything more?"

"Do you call him by his title all the time, or what?" the careful Louise inquired.

"My dear child, the less title the better."

"What do you call him, Violet?"

"I? Oh, I call him Lorme, and, if you promise not to tell, I have called him Félix once or twice on sentimental occasions."

"When were they?" demanded Louise, curiosity being one of her few passions.

"Merciful Heavens! What a catechism! What this and what that! No more questions answered today, *mes enfants*."

"Does"—began Louise, then, remembering the ban

Cousin Julia

on questions, she changed the form. "I hope he speaks good English, Virgie, or you'll be able to talk to him much more than I," she said plaintively.

"Have no fears for that, his English is quite perfect, Louise," said Violet, condescending one more bit of information. She scented in Louise's remark an approaching rivalry between the girls and wondered.

They were all sitting in the big dressing room the sisters shared, each having her nails done in turn by a circulating beauty specialist. Louise and Virginia were in graceful kimonos of contrasting colors, Louise's things being invariably blue and Virginia's pink, although Louise preferred pink and would have had it but for this unwritten family law which dated from their infancy. Their hair, which had just been washed, hung in luxuriant waves about their shoulders, spread out to dry on large white towels pinned about their necks by the attendant skin, nail, and hair scientist. The name of this person had always been Jenks, until, feeling that something was due the profession, she prefixed a "Madame de" to it, and thereby evolved a name more suited to such a career.

Madame de Jenks never shampooed, treated, manicured and incidentally robbed any but the socially élite and she was the *chronique scandaleuse* of the community, except that there was seldom or never any scandal. It was for the most part only a wealth of minor gossip that she poured out with her perfumed oils and rubbed into the scalps of *tout Paris*. The Bradford household had lately become so bountiful a source that her other patients frequently took an extra face massage in order to hear the rest of the tale. Mrs. Tillinghurst had at once discouraged loquacity

Cousin Julia

on the part of Madame de Jenks, so the latter had but the more time to listen. This attitude had also the effect of increasing her already high opinion of Mrs. Tillinghurst.

"Never gossip with such people, it's common," had been Violet's observation. "Their opinions are usually of no importance, not because of their position but because of their lack of intellect. Clever commentators upon men and things do not, as a rule, clean finger nails for a living and they're the only people who make gossip worth while."

Louise, who had heretofore derived much pleasure from the visits of Madame de Jenks, now became distinctly frigid to her, but the dictum did not affect Virginia. She had always loathed the whole performance and had kept her nose in a book, holding it in one hand while the other was occupied or propping it against something when both were in requisition.

Today, as they sat there in this feminine intimacy, Violet examined the girls with renewed interest. They were both so wholesomely young that they had scarcely become individuals, much less personalities. Louise, the younger in years, was already the older of the two in the ways of the world. Strangely enough, she seemed more difficult to understand, infinitely less get-at-able than her sister, probably because her complexities, such as they were, lay entirely on the surface. You encountered them at once, while Virginia's were more remote, buried in the depths of her much richer nature. Louise in a few years, after marriage perhaps, would crystallize. Her small growth would end early. But Virginia, Violet felt, would go far. Meanwhile they were both altogether winning as they light-heartedly took their small measures in the way of

Cousin Julia

rosy nails and shining hair to aid them in the young conquests they did battle for.

Violet suddenly thought of Lorme. Would he fancy them, make love to them? And if so, which one would it be? Perhaps both, very likely both. Violet smiled to herself. "It's well I'm leaving before his visit ends," she thought. "I would doubtless be jealous." She sprang to her feet. "I'm going, kiddies. Till by and by."

Louise's drawl followed her.

"Isn't she perfectly fascinating?" she moaned, her eyes on the slight retreating figure, with its erect, sloping shoulders and finely set head.

X

MOTHER, who's this Frenchman you've got here anyway?" J. C. inquired of his wife. It was the evening of the ball and he was laboriously getting into his dress clothes. They were difficult always, so many studs and buttons were involved, but he liked wearing them. He was also very fond of wearing silk hats—they conveyed, for some reason, a peculiarly holiday mood to J. C.

"You know all about him, Jim. I told you last night when you got back from Chicago."

"I know you did but I was thinking of something else."

"Well, I never!" she exclaimed and was about to proceed with her explanation when her husband interrupted.

"Tie's ready now," he announced; "come and fix it."

Mrs. Bradford obediently went to him and tied the bow under his bearded chin. He had given up the ready-made white knots, on an elastic that hooked, only under great pressure and in a fury of incomprehension. When the bow was tied and patted into place he put on his black coat and went to the full-length mirror to inspect the results. On occasions of this kind J. C. smelled strongly of scented soap and in his expensive clothes which never seemed to fit he suggested early photographs of Abraham Lincoln. He himself, however, was always entirely satisfied with the results.

Cousin Julia

"I guess I'll do," he remarked with some pride.

"I declare, J. C., you're like a child about dressing up," his wife remarked. "You never can bear being around at little parties that are informal, but when it's a question of rigging out in everything you've got you're as pleased as Punch."

"Well, what are parties for?" he demanded.

"They're for a good many things, Jim," his wife answered.

"Humph! Good for nothing mostly, I guess. But," relenting, "I do like a big fine party once in a while with everything first class. This thing, though, of a few people sitting round just gassing, where you have to listen to them talking all night, makes me sick. Say, Mother, how long's this Frenchman going to stay around?"

"I don't know—a few days, I expect."

"I'm not sure I like having him here. He might get taken with one of the girls."

"Well, what if he did?"

"Oh, I suppose it wouldn't matter. I guess Lucy or Virgie would settle him quick enough." J. C. chuckled. "Why, he's as pretty as a girl, and that black mustache as big as your finger, say!"

Mrs. Bradford looked up at him from the diamond brooch she was fastening as he said this and her expression was one of tender—more or less tender— forbearance. She paid no further attention to his remark. J. C. settled himself comfortably, to the instant destruction of his coat tails, on a chaise longue, and planting his spectacles far down on his bony nose, went over some figures in a broker's publication.

"You better hurry, Ma."

Cousin Julia

"Don't say Ma, J. C."

"I guess I'd better say Madame now," he said with another chuckle. This was as near as J. C. ever came to making a joke.

XI

IT had begun to be the custom in Columbia at that time to give balls in the second story of a fashionable caterer's establishment uptown known as Willoughby's Hall. Violet tried to induce Mrs. Bradford to ignore this custom and have the party at home, but without success.

"Columbia is surely small enough still to be able to give parties at home and it's so much prettier in a house. This one would do very nicely with the big hall and all the fire places," she argued. "And then there's the staircase. A staircase adds so much."

Cousin Julia looked at her blankly. Violet hastened to elucidate.

"There's something about swarms of young girls in pretty light dresses going up and down stairs that's full of charm, I think. Colonial, rather." She paused vaguely. There are certain fancies that cannot be made clear if they are not at first understood.

"I don't see anything colonial about girls going up and down stairs, or what that has to do with a dance," said Cousin Julia concisely.

Violet laughed.

"Maybe it hasn't. Doubtless no one ever fancied that but me. I think I meant, simply, that it would all have a grace, a sort of—well—intimate formality a hired ballroom can't have."

Mrs. Bradford, who was standing by the window, merely tapped on the sill with her eyeglasses and tilted

Cousin Julia

her chin a little more stubbornly in the air. She intended to give the big ball of the season and invite all the world, and she felt that all the world could not dance, eat, smoke, lounge and play cards within the spacious but by no means unlimited confines of 645 Howard—to use the expression by which she always referred to her own home. And as she willed, so of course it came about.

Willoughby's hall was taken for the occasion and on the important night was festooned with southern smilax and sweet with the expensive breath of hothouse flowers. Hired palms veiled a formidable orchestra enthroned on a platform and the adjoining supper room put on all the airs of a professional restaurant with its array of small tables, shaded candles and swarms of black waiters.

Mrs. Bradford was soberly content. It seemed to her that the occasion was most favorably circumstanced and would be a successful and somewhat important achievement. She liked having the Tillinghursts; Lorme's arrival the night before was most auspiciously timed; and last of all the weather had assumed a carnival splendor. It was a perfect night of early winter, a night for satin and for white, bare throats smothered in fur, for the mystery of hurrying carriages, closed and gleaming changefully in the glare of passing lights; for the sound of music remotely playing behind glowing, rose-hung windows. The really bitter cold had not yet set in and the dry, sparkling air hung still as crystal over the snow-covered world. In a black sky the stars flashed with the strange intensity such nights give to them, when they seem to have drawn all life from the quiet air and the white pall of silent snow and taken it to their own fierce

Cousin Julia

hearts. The cold was vast and sweet, and winged with a swordlike purity.

Lorme, who had paused in his dressing to light a cigarette, stood entranced at the window, looking down at the city. He was, at first, amazed at its size. The wonder of it penetrated him. Sixty—possibly seventy years—a short lifetime—to have changed a forest wilderness into this! And it seemed to him now, in the still darkness, to be under some spell—the domes and spires and long rows of purple arc lights wore such a look of unreality.

“It is beautiful, all of it!” he exclaimed half aloud, as his gaze left the panorama below him and traveled westward toward the lake and open country, while the town itself, with its myriad dots of light, shrank to the proportions of a German illuminated Christmas card. He thought of the illimitable, snowy plains that spread on and on to the Pacific, and a sense of the sheer size of the new western country came to him as though the snowy stillness were a glass in which he could see a vision of it all—of the vast frozen prairies, so empty of life after the teeming countries he knew, but so big with an unknowable future. He saw the thin steel ribbons that the genius of one man, he had been told, had flung across them and on over the gigantic mountain barrier of the Rockies to the velvet slopes of the Pacific—last outpost of the Occident, bathed in the vast sea that unites them with Asia. For the moment Lorme would have liked to have been that man, to have looped the ribbon of steel that had created a new empire. He turned away from the window with a tingling sense of the fullness of life. That the sight of some moonlit snow and a book on the history of the Northwest had made him long to be the greatest of

Cousin Julia

railroad builders did not surprise him. The last time it had been Verlaine, and he had yearned to have died of squalor in a Parisian jail and written "Sagesse." The facile and futile joys of the dilettante had always been his and he walked by the prismatic light of strong though changing enthusiasms.

Lorme's face, with the mixture of French and Spanish blood that was his, was almost beautiful, while retaining, for all its beauty, an acute Latin masculinity. It is difficult to tell how such faces, with their clear, thick skin, straight features and warm, dark eyes so heavily lidded, achieve this complete absence of effeminacy, but they do. Lorme's did. His voice, trained to the music of cultivated French prose, lost none of its value when he spoke English, and combined with his appearance to create a personality of rather unusual charm. He was aware of this, but fancied himself indifferent to the fact.

At the ball, his late arrival with Bob was greeted with much interest. Violet had been obliged to go early and stand in line with Cousin Julia and various ladies of local importance and receive the stream of incoming guests. Frau von Ernst was also there early, dressed, as Violet remarked with a vague irritation, just as she would have expected her to be—"Inevitably pale gray, old lace and seed pearls," she said to herself perversely. And of course J. C. had arrived, but had gravitated at once to the smoking room, where he spent the rest of the evening, enjoying himself hugely in a silent youthful way.

Louise and Virginia were both light-headed with excitement and pleasure. Happiness always beautifies and that night they achieved the utmost beauty of girlhood, the beauty of stars and flowers, sparkling but

Cousin Julia

tender, translucent and cool as rose petals in the sunshine. They were both gowned in white, with emanations of drifting gauze and garlands of daisies. Always favorites at parties, tonight they were acknowledged belles and constantly surrounded. They were, however, a shade less engrossed in receiving these attentions than usual. Louise's abstraction was not, of course, permitted to appear, but Virginia's radiant dark eyes constantly sought the doorway with expectant glances. Lorme, of whom she had really seen but very little since his arrival the night before, had entirely captivated her imagination and there was a breathless hollow at the pit of her stomach, where the essence of the sensibilities appears to dwell, whenever she thought of him, and which received an electric-like shock when he finally arrived.

"There he is," she burst out and hastened away from a group of boys who were maintaining a sketchy, bantering kind of conversation with her, and who would have been offended had they not forgotten to be in their youthful curiosity to see the stranger. Louise heard with disapproval her sister's exclamation, but she calmly, though with deepening color, ignored it. Then, the music having begun, she gave herself to the arms of her partner.

Lorme danced with Louise first and she felt afterward that she had acquitted herself very well. She had talked a great deal in her prettily affected way, her little pose had sustained her admirably, and his expressive face, which conveyed a drop of feeling as though it were a bucketful, stimulated her, as it stimulated all women, by its implied interest and sympathy.

When Virginia's turn came and he was before her,

Cousin Julia

asking for the dance, she blurted out with an absurdly sincere *gaucherie*,

"Oh, no, this is only a twostep; let's dance a waltz first."

She commanded—her humor having quite deserted her, as it not infrequently does at nineteen—the "Blue Danube" from the musicians for the occasion, and with a thumping heart and lips sealed with timidity she danced all the formless romance of youth to the beautiful, silly old music which will always typify love in gold lace and a court train.

"How well you dance!" Lorme exclaimed in French when it was over. He had enjoyed the waltz and the relief from the incessant chatter of the other girls. Virginia answered him with a touching exclamation of thanks in his own language. He looked at her with interest. Then shyness overcame her again. There was a tumult of incoherent thoughts in her brain but she could not find one to express to him. She talked fluently and amusingly enough with her boy friends—why, why could she think of nothing to say now, of all times? Lorme made a few remarks which she answered, her own words sounding, she was so painfully self-conscious, quite strange and meaningless to her and then he left her to another partner. Tears filled her eyes. "He will never want to dance with me again," she thought extravagantly, and added with the savageness of despair, "I hope he won't!"

Living, to Virginia, was a succession of moods, desires and sensations of unfailing intensity. She took everything hard and it is not an occasion for surprise that her initial attack of love at first sight should have stricken her speechless. She saw very little of him again that evening and her self-love was not long in

Cousin Julia

healing under the balm of admiration it received. At first she found herself mentally outlining conversations of extraordinary brilliancy wherewith to dazzle him when the next opportunity offered, and then her natural gayety rose and swept the incident into oblivion.

The dancing went on almost continuously, the tireless musicians flourishing their bows and thumping the piano with unenthusiastic but rhythmic persistence. Gradually window after window was opened to cool the overheated room and the walls became paneled with squares of silver blue, for the moon had risen and filled the sky with a misty radiance. It was very late.

"You're having a *succès fou* tonight, aren't you?" Violet said to Lorme. They were standing a little to one side watching the guests pour into the supper room.

"We might suspend activities and stop here for a moment," she went on, "unless you're in great haste to join the rest and receive your plate of chicken salad with two olives and a finger roll on it?"

"Finger roll, finger roll, what's that?" said Lorme teasingly.

"As you perfectly well know what it is, I shan't bother to explain," she replied. She sat down in a little bowerlet of hired jungle, giving, as she did so, the straight-backed, ugly pine chair a characteristically fastidious glance of distaste.

Lorme looked at her admiringly. She wore a sleeveless gown of black velvet, daringly free from ornament and daringly slashed in a long V at the back. Most of Violet's beauty lay in her distinction and purity of line, and the curve of her neck and perfect

Cousin Julia

poise of her head were displayed and emphasized by the severe décolletage she affected.

"Always more charming," he murmured.

She smiled.

"I am glad you find me so, especially here in the enemy's country, so to speak."

"Enemy's?"

"As soon as a woman begins to lose it, youth becomes her enemy, Félix."

He laughed.

"May I sit down?" He pulled a chair near to hers.

"And smoke?"

She nodded and looked at him as he lighted his cigarette.

They did not speak for a moment. Almost everyone had gone in to supper and the steady unified tumult of voices came out to them.

"Horrid, isn't it," she said absently, "to hear a lot of people talking that way? It never sounds human to me."

"No, and to hear them laugh sometimes in a theater—have you noticed it?—like a sudden roar of animals."

"Exactly."

They both spoke as people do whose thoughts are other than their words. Again there was a silence between them. Presently she looked up and met his eyes.

"Please don't look at me in that way, Félix," she exclaimed suddenly.

Her remark surprised and rather offended him.

"I don't think I understand," he remarked stiffly.

"What way?"

"That's just it, you don't know yourself," she an-

Cousin Julia

swered. "It's a way that seems to mean all sorts of flattering and ardent things, whereas——!" She laughed.

He eyed her a moment questioningly, and then, finding in her eyes the real understanding he always met there, smiled.

"You're full of complexities tonight, my dear Violet. But it's not to talk about my looks that you kept me away from my finger rolls, eh?"

"No, frankly, I was curious to know what you thought of them."

"The young girls?"

"Yes."

"Oh, very charming, very charming indeed. And real *jeunes filles*, aren't they?"

"Yes, they've been nicely brought up. Which do you find the prettier?"

"Come, Violet! First my looks and now theirs! Let's talk of yours instead, and of you—Violet!"

He leaned toward her. With a quick breath she looked up at him and into his eyes for an instant and then her lids dropped. She felt his nearness acutely. For a moment they sat thus in eloquent silence. Then Violet rose; her smile was enigmatic, but her tone was normally flippant.

"*En avant!*" she exclaimed. "To do the chicken salad or die."

Lorme made a gesture of annoyance.

"Really, Violet——"

She met his displeasure with a light laugh and was moving toward the dining room when he caught her wrist and drew her back.

"Violet, you are always tormenting me; I don't understand——"

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Cousin Julia

"Which is the only reason that you want to. Perhaps I like to have you want to, who knows?"

She withdrew her arm from his grasp and stood looking at him. Then, with an entire change of tone she said,

"You're not a bad sort, really, Félix; in fact you're rather better than so many people one knows. Upon the whole I can recommend you with a fairly clear conscience. And I know, *cher*, though from force of habit you're too tactful to praise them to another woman, that you think my young relations charming, and some day," she smiled mischievously, "some day an American wife might be indicated, you know."

His only reply was a shrug of various significance. They went into the supper room and he paused as they entered to give himself a glance of careful inspection in the paneled mirror of the doorway.

XII

FRAU VON ERNST resided just about as far from the Bradfords as one could and still remain in Columbia. Hers had once been the fashionable neighborhood, but society had long since flown northward and bestowed itself on the heights overlooking the lake as far from the dirt-paved streets and spreading elms of the lower town as possible. Frau von Ernst, however, undismayed by the Keeley cures and Italian boarding houses that reanimated the deserted mansions of her friends, lived on contentedly in her old house. The thick shrubbery that now spread high above the garden wall veiled the bottle-nosed, hopeful gentlemen in (usually) black waist-coats with no coats and high white collars with no ties, who sat in pine rocking chairs on the piazza of the former C. P. Turner gray stone house, firm in the belief that if you can't cure yourself of something there is mercifully someone who can. This same garden wall had in the beginning been an annoyance to the neighbors almost amounting to a scandal. Nobody had walls, they had front yards, or if they did have walls they were low squatty ones that in no way destroyed the vista of shaven, open-faced, publicity-seeking lawns that lined the streets. And here were the von Ernsts with a wall any number of feet high and young shrubbery planted behind it destined to grow higher still and shut out the view even more pointedly. Somebody said it was a civic crime and

Cousin Julia

should be put an end to by the building laws, but it never was and now nobody cared. The shrubbery had grown very high and thick and hung over the top and sent flowering spears out across the sidewalk above the heads of the passersby. And inside was a real garden where Frau von Ernst lived in summer—whoever lived in or even dared set foot on a front yard?—with flowers and paths and tea, and occasional queer old men whom she befriended, and quantities of fat old dogs who seemed never to have been young and wild and detrimental to flower beds. The house itself, which was built before the arrival of the von Ernsts, looked, in an uncertain nightmare way, like the blurred skyline of a cathedral town. Frau von Ernst remembered having seen in some ambitious village a spreading, much beppinnaced municipal building and always declared with amusement that her house resembled that Gothic post office cut in two, with the mansarded and steepled upper story set flush upon the ground. It was of wood, painted a church gray, and would have been rather beautiful had it had four stories beneath it. Inside, however, though no room was of the size or shape that could possibly be expected, it was entirely prepossessing.

It was to this place that Frau von Ernst had come almost forty years before with her young husband. He was practically an exile, in disgrace, politically, with the Austrian government and repudiated by his family because of his marriage. It seems to be difficult for an Austrian of good position to marry any foreigner without contracting a *mésalliance*, and to have married an Italian singer was, of course, beyond all toleration. So he was comfortably supplied with means enough to provide for a prolonged residence in

Cousin Julia

foreign places. The almost romantic commercialism of the United States fired von Ernst with the desire to become a prince of finance, and he chose lumber or wheat or some such thing as his medium and Columbia as his base. Columbia succeeded vastly but von Ernst did not. His original supply, however, was very large, and as he only lost half of it and then quite unexpectedly died before he could do anything to the other half, the means were never lacking to keep up the "Gothic post office" in comfort. His death occurred shortly after that of their only daughter, a charming young woman of about twenty, and grief over this sorrow was supposed to have precipitated his decline. So Frau von Ernst had been a childless widow for so many years that most people had entirely forgotten she had ever been anything else and had also forgotten to wonder why she did not, after her husband's death, go home to live, a subject which had occupied the busy-bodies for some time after her double bereavement, Columbia, of course, not being without its professional wonderers who follow each body to its grave with their impertinences, who wonder why the bereaved ones don't go away if they remain at home; don't come back if they are away; don't sell their home if they keep it, or keep it if they sell it; why they don't dismiss a servant or else take on a new one; why they mourn so long or why their black is so transitory! One would like to exclaim, Whitman-like—Oh, the Curiosity-ridden, the Gossips, the Pryers, the Will-watchers—Oh, all those who batten on the cost of funerals, the property bequeathed, the probable steps toward a readjustment of broken lives to be taken by those whose bleeding hearts are beating against a coffin lid! But the eager pack had nosed after many a scent since it had had occasion

Cousin Julia

to follow Frau von Ernst full cry, and the fact of her and her quaint household and life of quiet well-doing was accepted as a part of the general scheme of things.

The evening after the Bradfords' party found Frau von Ernst seated in her rambling drawing-room, dressed in one of the warm, light, furry gowns she affected at home. The room was mostly lighted by the dancing firelight that burned again in the dark mirror of the grand piano and shone in the polished surface of the black Hawthorne vase that held a branch of scented pine over a small portrait of Virginia. One of the fat old dogs, a brown one with unpleasing leathery patches on his skin that receding vegetation had left completely bare, lay dreaming profoundly on the fold of her white dress, which she always spread a little wider on the floor for him. The room gave an impression of creamy white, with deeper moments of warm bright color in the chintzes, and the presiding dignity of many books and of a few, a very few, ornaments of real beauty—a picture or two, a vase, a mirror, a graceful palm, an Aubusson screen and a cabinet with some objects of vertu. The bright damask curtains were but partly drawn and through the long leaded panes the snow gleamed white under the rising moon.

Suddenly, from the far corner of the room came a string of the more harmless French oaths, harmless but emphatic.

"Sac à papier! Nom de mille cents cochers de facres! Nom de cent mille cents cochers de facres! It hasn't come out once, but not once! And look at the hour!" Frau von Ernst turned from the changing fire pictures and smiled at the speaker.

"Come, come, Panot! Try it once more."

Cousin Julia

"That, Madame, is, unfortunately, impossible." M. Panot rose from the little card table where he had been playing an ingenious solitaire of his own invention. "That is out of the question. It is now five minutes past the half hour." He placed the cards in their box and bestowed them, as was his wont, in the precise nook they had inhabited for years.

"It's very cold, Panot, why not stay and dine?"

"You are very good, Madame, but—a previous engagement——"

He threw out his hands with a racial expressiveness and strode over to the fire. This little conversation was also part of the routine. It seldom varied and was always maintained with conviction. M. Panot was shabby and shiny and bearded and his nervous, rather dirty little hands were always busy adjusting his flowing cravat—he was death on cravats and justly felt that no one in the United States tied one just as he did—or patting the bushy mat on his chin, and he was prouder—infinately—of his intimacy at Frau von Ernst's than of anything else in life, but he was proud too in another way about his moneyless and obscure position. At first it had seemed that they might conflict but a satisfactory compromise had been evolved. On the footing of an habitué of the house, he came whenever he cared to and read in the library or played his game of cards in the drawing-room, whether Madame was at home or not—that was the most delicious touch of all to Panot—but he never remained to meals. By always pleading a chimerical engagement, he avoided making a nuisance of himself and incurring obligations of a material kind he could not repay, and concealed, he half believed, his friendless condition. Frau von Ernst knew all about him presumably, but,

Cousin Julia

aside from the vague impression that he had tried to bring out a French paper and failed, no one else did.

Her specialty had always been the small, but constant stream of more or less penniless foreigners of the better class, who wander, sadly incapable and helpless, through the United States. Why they come, and what they expect to do or where they eventually go, no one, including themselves, seems to know. She helped them to get classes or give readings, or sing songs, or do whatever they seemed to feel was their profession, and some were grateful and some were not, and none were ever successful. Frau von Ernst, however, in each case, hoped and longed for their success and gave no thought to their attitude toward her. One of the last had been a young Italian flute player who had adored her, borrowed money from her and finally left, placing a bomb under her front porch because he learned that she derived her income from a trust. The bomb, like everything else he put his hand to, was a failure, except in the intense amusement it afforded Frau von Ernst.

"I wish you would stay, Panot; the Doctor is coming," his hostess repeated cordially.

"Indeed!" replied Panot with a certain acidity in his tone. "Doctor——?"

"Dr. Haslip, of course, Panot; who else?" Frau Ernst caressed the dog's silky brown head and smiled affectionately up at the little man. She felt much the same toward them both, but she would scarcely have liked to touch Panot.

"Dr. Haslip, of course," repeated Panot. "A very nice man, no doubt, for those who can endure his views. You, Madame, being an intelligent woman, can perceive where he would bring us. The end of the world would be a blessing when Dr. Haslip got through with us!"

Cousin Julia

Under his bushy eyebrows Panot's black eyes were beginning to flash.

"Universal education—pooh! One man as good as another—pooh!" He accompanied each "pooh" with a snap of his fingers and no words can describe the contemptuousness of this gesture.

"Send my coachman's son through the Sorbonne and let my own son clean the stable! That's what he wants. Can't he see it's just changing things round? Somebody's got to clean the stable, haven't they? Never mind! Never mind! Everybody's too good to work for anyone else, so just shut down the government, no more government! We don't want a government! No government, no prisons, never mind prisons—invite the man who murdered your father in to murder the rest of the family!"

When a Frenchman is conservative there is no one on earth one-half so conservative as he is, and despite his ragged beard and his grubby hands Panot was conventionality, the worshiper of things as they are, personified.

The smile in Frau von Ernst's eyes deepened.

"Good old Panot," she murmured tolerantly.

"Socialism, pooh!" he went on breathlessly. "Do away with churches, marriages, God, everything! Put stable boys on the thrones of kings, never mind! That's what we've done in France, and look at it—look what the canaille have done to France!"

"Think what royalty did to France, Mr. Panot!" remarked a voice from the doorway.

Panot whirled around angrily. He seemed about to burst out again, but restraining himself, he measured the newcomer with a malevolent eye, then, as though just recognizing him, said:

Cousin Julia

"Ah, Dr. Haslip—this is a pleasure," and with a deep bow to his hostess, and one or two flourishes of involved significance, M. Panot made an impressive exit.

"Poor Panot!" Frau von Ernst exclaimed when he had left. "He becomes more *réactionnaire* all the time."

"Yes, he doesn't think very deeply, I'm afraid. You know my theory—people can be a trifle reactionary, maybe, by temperament, but only thoroughly so through a lack of—well—of works, you know." He tapped his forehead significantly. "Don't you think so?"

"I believe I do."

"And how the old fellow hates me!"

"It's love or hate with Panot, nothing in between. He's always frothing out of the bottle. What an exhausting business living must be to him! And, of course," she laughed a little, the warm, communicative laugh that was one of her charms, "he's jealous of you!"

Haslip laughed with her.

"I know it, and yet you're the only woman on earth that's not a woman to him. You're a superior being that he adores, but all the others are so many *women* to Panot, the way they are to all Latins." He laughed again. "He has that appraising, high-handed, cavalier 'tut the pretty hussies' expression!"—The memory of old Panot strutting and twirling before some totally unconscious female brought the tears to his eyes.

Frau von Ernst laughed in sympathy, but there was a tender quality in her voice.

"We mustn't laugh at him, Haslip; he's a good friend and an old one."

Cousin Julia

"That's right, that's right," he responded heartily. He sat down with characteristic abruptness, and, pulling a handkerchief out of his sleeve, mopped his eyes, and smoothed his gray, military-looking mustache.

Haslip was an Englishman, and a greater contrast to the old Frenchman could not be imagined. Trim and clean and healthy looking, he was as conventional in his appearance as Panot was in his point of view, but Haslip's brains were the vagabond's, and fared forth on many untrodden paths. His vision was keen for unknowable futures, and his quick ear, ever to the ground, heard the first echoes of the distant music of greater things to come.

He had been for many years a practicing physician, but had suddenly given it up.

"I've come a little too near," he told Frau von Ernst, "to realizing the human body to ever dream, with the limited knowledge we have, of prescribing for it. I'm through."

At first she scarcely believed him to be serious, but when she saw that he was, offered no contrary advice. He then took to writing and published a great many papers, mostly concerned with warning young doctors against the fundamental unreliability of diagnosis, and inculcating in them—did they read him, which they mostly didn't—a profound distrust of their profession and its achievements.

"You didn't go last night," said Frau von Ernst a little reproachfully, "and you promised."

"I did promise, but you knew I wouldn't."

"She was beautiful, lovelier than I've ever seen her."

"Yes, and the worst of it is she's just beginning; she'll be a lot lovelier in a few years."

"That is the worst of it, and she's getting no train-

Cousin Julia

ing for life—what an environment! But *I!*”—she spoke almost bitterly—“What little right have *I* to criticize!”

“Come now, come now, Caroline!” the Doctor exclaimed.

“I don’t forget, Haslip, Heaven forbid! But I’m many years older than Mrs. Bradford, and have suffered more. It’s only from that vantage that I permit myself to judge their lives, from that alone!”

“From that alone—rubbish! Caroline, you know better. It’s part of the fullness of life to realize oneself at one’s true value, and you’ve always blunted that vision in yourself by a lifelong and perfectly false assumption of a certain blame.” The Doctor’s tone was almost irascible. “I’ve pointed that out to you a thousand times.”

“I know, I know, Haslip, you have. But come, we are forgetting dinner, and the entrée mustn’t wait an instant.” They rose. “How’s your famous row about the what-do-you-call-it gland getting on?”

XIII

MRS. BRADFORD, whatever her faults, never made a fool of herself, and she had forged relentlessly in what she considered an upward direction with no abandonment of personal dignity. But if she had ever had a tendency to gush, she would have done so now. Lorme was to her supremely satisfactory. She felt so acutely that he was indeed a step in advance. His whole manner conveyed a rarer social atmosphere than she had as yet even sniffed at, and she basked in it, she almost assimilated it. In fact she did feel a slightly different woman when he left, just as she had felt different when she moved into the big house or first wore sables. The girls informed their intimates that they simply adored him and his visit was, on the whole, entirely successful. He took part in all the gayeties and continued to find the novelty of their freedom and good comradeship delightful. He sleighed and skated and slid downhill and danced, and on the long Sunday afternoons when no frivolity of any kind was permitted by Mrs. Bradford he listened to Virginia's music.

When, at last, his visit came to an end, he accepted an emphatic invitation to visit them in the spring, on his way back from California. Virginia put on her one black frock the night he left, mourned in secret for some days, and greatly enjoyed her sorrow whenever she happened to think of it during the rest of the winter.

Cousin Julia

When the weather began to break and the first crocuses thrust their fur hoods through the melting snow, she was out splashing over the slushy roads in her taut black riding habit, a sprig of pussy willow thrust in her buttonhole and the red of crab apple blossoms in her cool cheeks. She rode with a handsome, sentimental youth, Davie by name, who quoted the "Brushwood Boy," but there was a little thrill in her heart like the flutter of a bird's throat when she thought of Lorme.

Louise did not ride, but she chose her clothes with unusual care. Spring was in her too, and all the determination of Julia Watts besides.

Lorme, although he had rather expected that he might not, kept his promise and returned. He had seen plenty of girls, rich girls, attractive girls, smart girls, but Louise still seemed to him surprisingly well brought up, and Virginia had a penetrating charm he had found in no one. The winter, too, had been depressing. The paternal investments fulfilled all his worst expectations, and he was homesick. He ardently wished himself back in France but certain circumstances made it inconvenient to sail until late in May and a sudden impulse inclined him to spend the intervening two weeks with the Bradfords.

Mrs. Bradford knew that his return would make people talk and that all their world was wondering whether he had serious intentions, and if so which girl it would be—everyone, of course, but their father, and he was scarcely of their world.

How finally an ultimate desire, a sometimes almost unconscious one, maps out the course we follow and how palpably the reason, the conscience, the anything that may oppose it, are fake barriers we force up

Cousin Jūlia

merely to be overthrown by the current! This was particularly true of Mrs. Bradford. She wanted, although perhaps she had not said it to herself, Lorme for a son-in-law, and she wanted it with characteristic, blind intensity of purpose. It had become part of her ambition. She was not introspective, and she imagined, doubtless, that she had given the matter a clear and unbiased examination, and that, after considering it well, she had made a reasonable decision. As a matter of fact she had never even attempted, aside from ascertaining that his title was real, to analyze the young man, to consider whether he would be a good husband, whether he was in any way fitted to make any girl—one of her girls—happy; in a word, to examine the situation face to face with the door locked and ambition on the *outside*.

The fact that this was his second visit created a certain feeling of intimacy between Lorme and his hosts which had not existed before. Virginia, however, could not for some time quite overcome her awkwardness. She wished so much to be at her best when she was with him that she stiffened into self-consciousness. But her manner was full of charm to him. To win her from it was like coaxing some shy young animal who longs, and yet delicately fears, to yield to your friendship. She was gayly at her ease with people about, but became silent and elusive when they were alone. At first she would make some excuse to get away, but later took refuge at the piano, and Lorme, who loved and understood music, often played with her. Then he felt a desire to share her other great pastime—riding.

“Why,” he said to her one morning, “do you never let me ride with you?”

Cousin Julia

He had come into the drawing-room and found her in her habit, standing by a window.

"I'm afraid it's going to rain," she murmured, looking out at the sky.

"Is that the answer?"

She laughed.

"I'd love to have you, but there isn't another horse. No one likes it but me."

"So you will let me?"

"Of course. I didn't think you cared about it."

"Then that's settled," he declared. "The horse is a small matter; the world is full of horses."

There was some difficulty about it, however. Virginia was anxious to get him a decent mount, but Mrs. Bradford, for some reason, was not helpful. Lorme ended it all, however, by declaring himself indifferent to the indignity of a livery stable nag, so they spent many companionable hours together exploring the country roads beyond the city. Virginia's timidity disappeared on these occasions, for the fear which at other times assailed her, that she might suddenly be unable to think of anything to say, was put to rout by the fact that at any awkward moment she could gallop and so save the situation.

It was a clear, sun-filled spring, with much of winter still left in the fresh vigor of its mornings. Here and there the wild plum and apple trees were blossoming and all about them was the pale bright green of infant, growing things. Gradually they became friends. They found that they could laugh together and be silent together, and, as her self-consciousness left her and she no longer sought for subjects of conversation, that they could talk together endlessly and happily.

Of course, Louise, too, claimed a great deal of his

Cousin Julia

attention. She was at her best in the evening when she permitted not a little of her exquisite fairness to be revealed by her evening attire. She had then a jewel-like beauty that caught at one's breath—with the light on her topaz-glowing hair, her pearl-white rounded arms and breast.

The time passed quickly and Félix was curiously content. The girls made the house a flower garden, and with the feeling of almost frightened depression his own material prospects bred in him, the atmosphere of substantial and growing wealth by which he was surrounded acquired a sudden importance and was vaguely reassuring. But the end of his visit was approaching, and one evening at dinner he told them that in a day or two he would have to be off. He and Virginia had spent the afternoon on horseback. It had been a day of silent meanings and understandings. Their words had not seemed to signify what they always did, but something vastly apart, something palpitating and vague, to which their laughter gave tender expression. They were very gay but her sensitive imagination pictured it as sacred dancing before a shrine, with, back of it, she felt, something bigger, holier, more mysterious, and her youth asked itself—what?

And now, when he told them of his departure, he spoke to Mrs. Bradford but he looked at Virginia, and their eyes met with an eloquence that was almost audible. Louise saw the glance and looked calmly away. Mrs. Bradford saw it too and patted her sharp red nose with her lace handkerchief. Presently she asked what everyone was going to do that evening. She bent a particularly inquiring glance upon J. C.

"I've got to go to the office, Mother," he replied

Cousin Julia

promptly, feeling that some social activity might be in the wind, and taking immediate measures.

Virginia said that some boys were coming later and that they were all expected somewhere or other. Then Mrs. Bradford's eyes turned to the young Frenchman. She seemed about to suggest something but did not. She closed her lips again with the expression of one who has decided for a little longer to let things take their own course. After dinner Virginia immediately sought the piano, and Louise bent her yellow head over an embroidery frame. She was fond of needlework and remarkably skillful at it. Her mother sat across the room sipping her coffee with Lorme. Virginia played on softly, looking, with eyes that saw him not, at a plaster Beethoven frowning vacuously from a niche in the near-leather wall. By and by Lorme put down his cup and strolled over to the piano. He sat down near the girl and occasionally asked her to recall something he wanted to hear.

Mrs. Bradford considered them intently and then her gaze sought the blonde, drooping head of her other daughter. The night before Lorme had danced a good deal with Louise—she danced delightfully—and when she bade her mother good-night she had shown her a sudden and quite unprecedented affection.

"If you have plenty of escorts and will excuse me," Lorme remarked, "I think I'll not go tonight."

The girls both protested, but Mrs. Bradford observed:

"That's sense. Stay and keep me company. I'd like to see how it feels to have a beau once more," she finished, with a stiffly assumed levity. Like many shal-

Cousin Julia

low and determined people she was astoundingly humorless.

After the departure of the girls her habitual seriousness returned. Lorme walked up and down the room once or twice and then remarked:

"I'd like to talk with you very frankly tonight, Mrs. Bradford, if I——" he began, when she hastily interrupted him.

"I was thinking that I'd like a little talk with you," she did not look at him; "I'd—I would like to talk with you about the girls."

He glanced at her in some surprise.

"Indeed! I——"

She went right on:

"I don't often confide in people, or talk about family matters." Still she did not look at him, and then she finished irrelevantly, "I hope I try to do my duty."

The young man's surprise grew—none of this sounded in the least like Mrs. Bradford.

"You see," she said, tapping her knee with her eyeglasses, "you see, I want to do everything for them—the girls—but," she hesitated and then went right at it, "but Louise is our only daughter. Virginia is—is not."

Lorme almost jumped at her disclosure, it was so abruptly made and so entirely unexpected. He wondered, moreover, why she was making it. He had said nothing so far to make her think it was of significance to him. Meanwhile Mrs. Bradford was talking again.

"She's a—a sort of connection of my sister's, and she's a good girl, a sweet girl too, and we're devoted to her, but she's not, after all, like Louise to us." At last

Cousin Julia

she looked at him. "Louise is my own daughter and she comes first."

"Of course, quite natural," Lorme managed to remark, while a conviction as to the real meaning of the whole procedure took root within him.

"We'll always do what we can, what we ought, for Virginia, but it would be wicked, downright wicked," that word always sustained Mrs. Bradford, "not to do most for Louise. J. C.," she looked away again and her face flushed an uncomfortable red, "J. C. feels the way I do."

Lorme, finding that a little reflection was necessary, got up and resumed his pacing across the room. Mrs. Bradford watched him indecisively. At last she spoke again.

"J. C. is right well off," she said musingly; "but girls are so expensive, what with dowries and all, I'm sometimes glad I have only one daughter."

Again Lorme made some perfunctory answer and again he resumed his walk. An alluring photograph of Louise caught his eye every time he turned. She was in evening dress and her curving softness, her young but rich development spoke enticingly from its semi-concealment. Lorme thought of many things. He thought of the disastrous financial revelations of the past months, and of a future based on, and re-adjusted according to, those revelations. Suddenly he paused in front of Mrs. Bradford.

"Since you have honored me with so much frankness, I would like to be frank with you, too. But what you have told me makes it difficult."

Mrs. Bradford looked at him sharply.

"Makes it," he repeated, "infinitely more difficult than I had expected. You know I am hopelessly poor."

Cousin Julia

I have no right to speak at all, but I feel that I must at least be frank with you. I care for Louise, and now that I know that she's your only daughter I don't see how I can ask you for her hand."

There were times when Mrs. Bradford rose to great heights.

"I suspected it all along," she replied; "and if Louise feels the way I do, I guess it will be all right, money or no money. I guess she'll have enough for two."

They both drew a long breath and there was just a suspicion of astonishment in their meeting gaze. Lorme pulled himself together and kissed her hand.

"I have no words," he murmured, "with which to thank you." Then he turned to stare at Louise's portrait. "Of course," he said presently, "I must speak to Mr. Bradford."

"You leave that to me," was the decisive reply. "You can talk to him later."

XIV

IT would be useless to go at any great length into the interview which took place between Mr. and Mrs. Bradford on the subject of this brilliant international match. J. C. was not good at arguing with women. After his first tempestuous reception of the news, he committed himself to the peril of discussing it calmly, and therein lay his downfall. He found that he seemed to be contradicting himself, to be making illogical remarks, to be getting conversationally into holes he couldn't get out of. Perfectly plain statements of his seemed, under manipulation, to leap into most uncompromising positions from which they treacherously weakened his cause. Aside from his inability to defend, verbally, the stand he took, there was the many years' custom of relegating the entire domestic control to his wife. Had she, or had she not, she wanted to know, done her task well? Weren't the girls nicely brought up? They seemed to be. Weren't they pretty, popular, charming? They were. Weren't they healthy? He could not deny their robustness. Why, then, would her common sense and good judgment, which she had proved for so long, suddenly desert her? Why indeed? Hadn't he himself married for love? Then why deny his daughter that previous privilege? There was but one end to all this. At last, though feeling quite as he had at the beginning, J. C. conceded. One of the proofs that his concession was not a conviction was his final exclamation, which is of interest for its future significance.

Cousin Julia

"Thank God, anyway, that it isn't Virginia!" he had cried.

Mrs. Bradford turned on him in sudden, half suppressed anger.

"There," she said bitterly, "you've always been more of a father to that girl than to your own flesh and blood!"

"Don't say that, Mother, for you've no call to. I take it that it's our duty to care for them both alike, *exactly alike.*"

XV

WHEN Félix went to his room that night he stood for some moments before the fireplace staring down at the clear flaming of the birch logs. And he smiled—a smile of detached amusement at his own thoughts, possibly at himself. He often found occasion to smile at himself and at his doings, which he was capable of regarding with perfectly impersonal and often satiric interest. Then he dropped into an easy-chair facing the blaze, and switching on a reading light at his elbow, took his mother's letter from the pocket of his dinner jacket. It was a long letter. She wrote seldom but always at great length, in the same roundabout way she talked, with many irrelevancies and some vagueness but with an unmistakable and eventually revealed purpose: letters so like herself that they had come to bring, during his long exile, tears of homesickness to the eyes of her dutiful and wholly devoted son.

He could see her now, seated at her old buhl desk—its elaborations had been one of the enchantments of his childhood—her gray hair beautifully dressed, her throat impressively collared, characteristically absorbed in the occupation of the moment. He opened the letter, with its distress and terror at the bad account he had had to send of their affairs, its frank turning to the next step—a rich marriage—its permission for him to act in this matter without formally asking her leave, or rather the forwarding of that per-

Cousin Julia

mission by mail so that it would be at hand if needed—a sort of blank check drawn on her parental authority and signed.

MY BELOVED SON:

I have been so overwhelmed by the unhappy results of your inquiries in California that until today I have not been able to write to you at all. And today, my dear boy, you must be content with a very few lines. [She had ended, as usual, by writing nine pages.] It is inconceivable that we should be without resources. Are you quite sure they understood who you are—I find that always makes a difference. How distressed your poor father would be! I have been considering the dots in our circle and I must say, Félix, that it has been very discouraging. There is Céleste Villeré, but she is so ugly that I know you could not be brought to consider her, and then, of course, there is always Madeleine. I suppose I could if I had to, but it would really be very hard. I have known her mother intimately for fifty years and that is always such a strain on the affections. You know, dear boy, how much I have always borne from her and how exhausted I am after their visit every summer. And for her in the end to get *you* for a son-in-law would be hard for me to bear. She could never forgive my child being a boy and handsome, and hers a girl and rather plain, not so plain of course but that—if I had to—— But it may not come to that. I can think of no one else really *comme il faut* and of course a *bourgeoise* is not to be thought of—a French *bourgeoise*. Better a person of no position at all—like an American for instance—than a girl of inferior station.

The little De Berri—Countess de Berri, whom your Cousin Jean is said to admire—inquired most kindly for you yesterday. I've heard she is an American but I never quite believed it, I preferred not to; much more likely, it seemed to me, a Russian, with that voice and good accent. She is a very dear friend of Madame Tillinghurst and told me that Madame Tillinghurst is of one of the best American families. I'm sure I don't know.

Cousin Julia

what she meant by that. I asked her and she said, "It really means a good deal, Madame," but she didn't say what. However, I was glad to hear it as I understand that you are with some relations of hers now. You know I have never been like your Aunt Justine, Jean's mother, who boasts that she has never met an American, black or white, in her life—or any other Colonial. She considers them Colonial like Australians or Canadians. Of course they aren't really, but they always will be to your aunt. "Not one, black or white," she declares (she has put in black since Jean became devoted to the little Madame de Berri), but it isn't really true. She has met one or two and I offered to prove it to her, but she said, "What does proof amount to anyway, what is it to me?"—and indeed it isn't much to dear Justine. But you know how loyal your Aunt is to the family and if there were an American in it where she couldn't be got out she would at once adopt her.

In short, dear child, I have every confidence in your judgment and give you from here my consent to anything you think wise. It would kill me to lose Rochefort and you know what a shocking mortgage there is on it, or this house here in town. Why, dear Prince Boris said only yesterday we had undoubtedly the best ceilings in Paris. She would have to be well brought up and preferably pretty as well as rich, and of course she ought to be a Catholic, but I understand that, although many of them aren't—so strange too, there seems to be no reason for anyone not being, especially nice people—even if they're not, they become so quite readily. But you understand the *convenances*.

Félix put down the letter at this point and resumed his scrutiny of the fire. He saw Louise, smooth and golden-haired, with her careful, gentle manners, her nice figure and pretty gowns—she was naturally *soignée* and would always be so—saw her before his mother. Madame de Lorme would say, "She is very nice, Félix, *quite* charming," and be really surprised at

Cousin Julia

her presentableness and amiable docility. And then, perversely, like a banner of perfume flung across the path from a swaying honeysuckle, came back to him the essence and the picture of Virginia. The picture of her as he had seen her that day, a drift of cloudy black hair tossed by the wind against the rose of her cheek, one slender black eyebrow lifted daintily above the other, in the gay caprice of her laughter. Whose words and whose touch would turn that gayety into rapture, who see those gray eyes—startled and languorous—soften and glow under their tangle of lashes till the drooping lids closed and hid them and left her lips to him?

He frowned. There was something haunting about the grace and lightness of her—the kind of a young body that is no thicker than a willow bough she had, and as pliant, and it would fit into a man's arms like a bird's song into the fragrance of a June morning. Lorme moved impatiently as if he would shake the goad of that memory from his consciousness, and then he went to his desk to write at once to Paris that Rochefort would not have to go, nor the Fragonard roses in the rue du Bac.

XVI

VIRGINIA learned of the betrothal the next day, the day before Lorme's departure. Mrs. Bradford called her into her room and made the announcement quite simply. Aside from a first involuntary exclamation of surprise, the girl gave no indication to her mother as to what her feelings on the subject might be. She listened carefully to a slight detailing of the immediate plans of the betrothed ones that followed, and then, with a murmured, "I must go and see Lucy," slipped from the room.

Standing before a window in the hall, and looking persistently at the budding branches of a scraggly elm outside, she repeated to herself:

"He loves Louise, and they're engaged; it's *Louise* he loves!" Then with a sudden deeper realization of her own heartache she repeated, "He loves her!"

But it was with her eyes full of courage, though her cheeks were white with a very youthful despair, that a moment later when she found her, she held out her hands to her sister and wished her joy, and kissed her.

Louise was radiant, she fairly exuded satisfaction and delight. When she had received the caress she turned back to the mirror and exclaimed:

"Virgie, it's simply *wonderful* to be engaged. I never was so thrilled in all my life. And I shall be a Marquise—think of that! I just can't believe it, and Cousin Violet told me he was a Count too, in some way; I must speak to him about it."

Cousin Julia

The idea of Marquise didn't wring Virginia's heart as did the idea of wife! She felt she must get out of the room.

"And besides all that—the excitement and the papers everywhere will be full of me like they were about the Duchess of—what was her name?—you know that Duchess, Virgie, and he's so handsome; don't you think he's the best looking thing?" She paused in her coiffing to cock her head sideways and give her own face a severely scrutinizing glance, and then resumed:

"And so romantic! He makes love just like a book!"

Louise went on in this strain for several minutes before she noticed that her sister had gone.

Grabbing her hat and jacket as she went, Virginia had set out for Frau von Ernst's as fast as her flying feet could take her. The sweet old garden, just delicately quickening to its new youth, was deserted, and Virginia threw herself on a bench under the library windows, and abandoned herself to her grief. At first she wept merely for what she had lost, for the ruin of hopes she had scarcely known she had till they were taken from her. Then, jealousy laid hold of her and she thought of the beautiful things he would say to Louise, of his caresses, of the joy of it all that was Louise's, and it seemed to her she couldn't bear it. But how could she have supposed, she reasoned, that he would prefer her, with her black hair and her long legs, to her pretty sister? But he had been very nice to her and had spent more of his time with her since his return than with Louise, it had seemed to her, and had said such nice, such very nice things to her, things her own ignorance had doubtless misconstrued. The memory of how he had kissed her hands when their last ride was over, and looked into her eyes, and told her

Cousin Julia

that he wanted to talk to her that night alone, came to her with a sudden vividness. Ah, well, it was probably to tell her of his love for her sister. At this her tears burst forth again.

Meanwhile the sound of her crying had reached Panot, who was busy with his solitaire in the drawing-room, and he now presented himself at the window back of her. He watched her a moment in great distress and at last exclaimed,

"But my dear child, this won't do at all! Can't old Panot do something for you?"

She shook her head, unable to answer, and in a moment he was at her side, patting her hands, and telling her that those things whatever they were that distressed her would undoubtedly come out all right.

"I tell you it will all be arranged, little flower, you'll see."

There were tears in his own eyes and somehow he was a great comfort. Virginia began to feel a bit cheered. She supposed that she would never be really happy again, but her store of suffering for the moment was exhausted. Panot's tears had now reached his beard and were sneaking through the underbrush like robbers through a forest. Virginia smiled at them and at him quite affectionately.

"M. Panot, can you swear an oath?"

He responded with the emphatic information that he unquestionably could.

"Then swear to me that you will never tell anyone, even Liebe Frau, we were crying today."

He swore, and Virginia, tucking her hand through his arm, allowed him to lead her indoors.

"I'm going to stay all night, Liebe Frau," she declared when Fran von Ernst returned.

Cousin Julia

"My dear child, how glad I shall be to have you," the older woman exclaimed, embracing her. "How are they all at home?"

"Oh, fine. Louise and Félix de Lorme are engaged."

"What!"

"Yes. He's leaving tomorrow and I think it would bore me to see them around making love."

Virginia whirled on her heel and caught old Panot gazing at her with the look of one who is putting two and two together. She was furious, and planting herself at the piano, rattled off a blur of dance music. It seemed to her that Frau von Ernst was rather pleased at the news.

"Well, well, I hope they'll be happy. I must see Louise soon. What time does he leave?"

"I don't know; if it's in the morning I'll just telephone him good-by."

Virginia did not see Lorme again, but seemed quite her usual self when she returned home the following day to be told by the family that she had been rude. The shadows dwelt in her eyes for a few days, or even weeks, and then she was out again with Davie, riding about the spring-wrought woods, thrilling to the opening plum blossoms, and listening to irrelevant quotations about Policeman Day.

Young love is hard, sometimes, but never deep, all poets to the contrary, notwithstanding.

PART II
ILLUSIONS

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XVII

DURING the six years which followed Louise's acquisition of a title the lives of the various members of the Bradford family proceeded with an even consistency. Uneventful years one might call them if one could believe that the act of living can ever be uneventful. There had been no momentous happenings, but the drab forces of the every day, which, working on the tissues of the individuality make of every moment an event, had not left any one of them untouched by the process of life. They had not all advanced, but not one of them had stood still.

In Paris Louise lived the life of fashionable conventionality her position offered her. At first Madame de Lorme, once the question of the wedding was settled, had been attacked by misgivings. The very fact that serious money difficulties were now at an end let her mind spring back to its normal bent, which was one of ignorance and suspicion regarding all Americans, and of intense conservatism. She realized that she had written to her son in a mood of almost hysterical terror as to the future and although determined to make the best of it all, she secretly asked herself whether perhaps even Madeleine—rather than a stranger—and a stranger from such a strange country? But her daughter-in-law's appearance reassured her and it was greatly to her surprise and delight that Louise, from the very first, begged instruction in the proprieties of her surroundings. This she slavishly followed and

Cousin Julia

soon fitted into her rigidly molded background of tradition almost as smoothly as she did into her charming toilettes. In fact she did it all a little too well, but acts as well as people must have the defects of their qualities. If she became a somewhat colorless puppet it made her supremely comfortable to get on with, and life went very smoothly both in the old hotel in the rue du Bac and in the chateau in Provence. Docile and filial, with her correct if somewhat restricted manner, she might almost have been French, and her beauty was a source of considerable pride to the older woman. Her money the Lormes' spent lavishly, finding it, after the manner of their kind, a small thing that was soon taken for granted.

When in town Louise went a great deal into society, which for many seasons thrilled her to the very marrow of her bones. Not that she allowed it to appear, but the ritual, the high sounding names, she enjoyed as only a true daughter of Julia Watts could enjoy them. No greater sacrifice could be laid on their altar than the agony she endured learning French. She determined to know it, and though intellectual activities were not congenial to her, though tears of vexation and ennui streamed down her cheeks over baffling verbs and grammatical abstractions, she did achieve an astonishing success.

Before the birth of her son Louise became a Catholic, and these two events took from her, in the eyes of her mother-in-law, her last alien stain. Perhaps she never came to love the girl, but she liked and approved of her. Neither of them understood, or felt the need of, self-expression, for Madame de Lorme's volubility was a surface one which hid far more than it revealed, and from the standpoint of her own innate reserve the

Cousin Julia

Frenchwoman admired Louise's reticences—among others, reticences concerning Félix. How much Louise understood him, just what she came to feel for him, and what she knew of his life and point of view his mother never knew, and was glad to leave unspoken between them. Lorme was an affectionate, polite and sufficiently conventional husband, whose regard for appearances equaled theirs, and both women were content to take him, as they took everything else, at his worldly valuation.

But although she could applaud and rejoice, it was by no means Madame de Lorme who so successfully transformed Louise into an all but faultless young *mondaine*. Violet Tillinghurst was always at hand to speak the illuminating word. She had not been able, of course, to give Louise any of her brilliancy and charm, but had succeeded, with the girl's natural tendency toward assuming a manner, in giving her the right pose. Louise was grateful and so was Cousin Julia, which was, of course, the main thing.

In America, Mrs. Bradford's steady will wrought incessantly. Chief among its outward manifestations was a new house. After prolonged travel in Europe and visits to her daughter both in town and in the country, she had decreed that the Bradford surroundings must change. This time no Middle Western decorator was to re-create them. The new dwelling was conceived, designed and decorated, down to the gardens and garage, in Paris, and was then reproduced, a beautiful incongruity, that bore little relation to a home, on a wooded hillside just out of Columbia, with a view from the paved terrace of the lake and distant hills. Then Mrs. Bradford, emboldened by a bank account whose powers she now acutely gauged and by

Cousin Julia

the possession of a daughter in the Faubourg St. Germain, gradually abandoned the homey, provincial—to use a much overworked word—manner of doing things that to a certain extent still prevailed in Columbia. Her photographic memory retained to the smallest detail the amenities of life in the rue du Bac, and these she introduced as much as was possible—which perhaps was not very much in the infinitely different atmosphere and among the infinitely different conditions of the Middle West—into her household. And she still succeeded, and perhaps it was in the end her only success, in not making herself ridiculous. On the contrary, she became, socially, a formidable figure. No one could quite afford to overlook the occasional but not too frequent dinners and teas, or the annual ball in Highland Road. Mrs. Bradford no longer kept her sharp gray eyes open for cards of invitation, and it is not improbable that many eyes of many colors watched for hers.

What J. C. thought of it all no one knew or, presumably, cared, unless it was Virginia. He had expressed no opinion of any kind since the difficult information had been conveyed to him in masterly fashion by his wife that Louise had become a Roman Catholic. Difficult, not because J. C. was illy disposed toward that particular form of belief—he was the least prejudiced of men and in no sense dogmatic, indeed he no longer went to church himself—but because Mrs. Bradford knew in some remote chamber of herself that he would question the motives. This was a very secret, and even to herself, unvoiced knowledge, for in all the active regions of her own consciousness no question of a question or of motives had ever been whispered. Like many direct people of her type, Mrs. Bradford existed,

Cousin Julia

so to speak, on the surface of herself, while a world of rejected consciousness lay just beneath, and she pursued the ends her temperament indicated without a glance at this subregion where the roots of her activities dwelt. J. C. was by no means a self-analyst either, but he was honest and his actions followed the straight if unexplored avenue of his principles.

The house in Highland Road really saw little of him. The immense demands upon his purse required a savage devotion to business, and he turned doggedly an ever and ever heavier millstone.

XVIII

THE summers in Columbia were apt to be, at least in spots, as hot as the winters were cold. There were terrific days when the asphalt melted and work horses fell dead in spite of their straw sunbonnets; when in the warm still evenings the drug stores swarmed with hatless girls in organdie attended by suitors and eating ice cream soda from long spoons; when the open trolleys were filled with mild middle-aged persons taking the air by riding around the belt; and when the children of the slums—for Columbia had its tenements—played in their tepid streets until late into the night. On such nights at the lake parks, the public pavilions, smelling of popcorn, blazing with lights, and reverberating to the thunder of brass bands, were crowded. Women and coatless men, dancing and eating and drinking, and dragging with them sleepy but determined children who fed endlessly on peanuts and ice cream cones, washed through them in billows of rather squalid humanity; while, outside, the converging alleyways of the park were choked with vehicles standing motionless in the Pierrot shadows of black foliage cut sharply into the mauve glare of the arc lights, their occupants listening to the music; and with it all, the smell of cigars, the pawing of horses on the graveled drives and the blare of *Trovatore* swelling out over the lake and dying in the mists beyond.

Such was Columbia, or at least a part of Columbia, the greater part, breathing after a long day of its

Cousin Julia

windless inland heat. But with this part, owing to the fact that Jim Bradford had been a fortunate and a wise investor, we have nothing to do.

This year the hot weather had come phenomenally early. It was the first night of June, a Saturday when there would be dancing after dinner, and the screened verandas of the Driving Club—one of the two outing clubs Columbia had acquired at that inevitable period in the lives of all American cities when country clubs appear—were crowded with diners. It was very close. Somewhere an orchestra scraped away pleasantly enough, and the faces of the black waiters shone with moisture, as they flourished plates of cold storage chicken, broiled, dishes of large, waxy, new potatoes with that peculiarly glazed surface achieved only at country clubs, and hard green peas in round saucers.

It was after seven o'clock but the sun had not yet gone down and a golden twilight hung over the slope of smooth, dappled green in front of the clubhouse. Groups of people lingered here and there on the lawn, and at a tea table, surrounded by half a dozen men and summer-clad young women, sat Virginia Bradford. She was in white, in the costly white of tailored flannel and cobwebby linen and Irish lace, with a broad tilted hat whose French inevitability seemed the only frame for the vivid oval of her face. She had altered, of course, but to find the change one would have had to look much deeper than eyes or skin or wide curving mouth—the six years through which she had just passed being those of all a woman's life that change least her looks and perhaps most her soul.

The people with her were characteristic of her social background. They were the nucleus of a set with

Cousin Julia

which, for some reason, it was considered most desirable to be identified. As everyone wished to be of them they could pick and choose, and the result was, that one had to be particularly pretty or amusing, particularly well connected or particularly rich, to be admitted in full intimacy.

Next to Virginia sat Davie, a tall slim young man of the super-refined type, who now quoted Browning and Rossetti to her in place of the "Brushwood Boy" of their younger days; and opposite, where he could look at her, and his eyes sought her pretty constantly, was Tom Collingsworth.

Collingsworth was at that time the supreme matrimonial possibility of Columbia. He had come out from Philadelphia several years before to manage the Western branch of his father's many financial interests, and as the Collingsworths were known to possess one of the really great fortunes of America as well as a perfectly adequate social background, he had opened to the mothers of marriageable daughters in Columbia a vista of possibilities that were conspicuously alluring. At present he was drinking a cocktail, and, as has been said, looking at Virginia.

"I'm not going up to dinner for ever so long," she was saying; "not till after the sun sets. It's too lovely here."

"Don't be silly, Virgie," Collingsworth observed. "You've been looking at the sun for an hour."

"Go on up, all of you," she replied generally. "Davie's going to stay with me. He hates soup. Don't you?"

It really hadn't occurred to him before, but now he realized that all people of sensibility must hate soup. He nodded almost scornfully. She smiled, and as she

Cousin Julia

did so, one eyebrow lifted whimsically, higher than the other.

"Go on," she repeated, "and do save me a place where I can't see Mrs. Winfield Watson."

The others laughed and promised, and getting up, strolled toward the clubhouse, throwing away cigarettes or daintily straightening skirts and hats as they went. The slim young man sat down again happily. Collingsworth, who had lingered behind, looked at them with a momentary hesitation and walked off. As he left a lyric murmur fell on his ears:

"How lovely are the portals of the night,
When stars come out to watch the daylight die."

He threw back his big blonde head and fell to whistling softly. He was not jealous of men who quoted poetry. Although he was hungry he did not join the others, but sat down on the veranda steps, and crossing his large white buckskin-clad feet, waited for Virginia.

The sun, deep rose-colored, swam slowly downward in a lake of violet mist and at last, with splendid suddenness, vanished into the purple-veiled abyss beyond the horizon. Full of its beauty Virginia rose in silence and advanced lingeringly across the fresh carpet of green, the evening light, emptied of color, touching with pale fingers her white frock. She walked well and the young man beside her tried dreamily to recall some verse under whose cover he could tell her she moved like a swan and carried her head with the startled grace of a young antelope. Then, having some humor as well as a great deal of romance, it occurred to him that a swan with the head of a young antelope might

Cousin Julia

appeal more to her very ready risibilities—if he could feel that she had a flaw, it would be her proneness to laugh—than to her sense of beauty, so he remained silent.

Collingsworth came down the steps to meet them.

“Do hurry up, Virginia,” he observed. “I just saw the soft-shelled crabs go in, and they’re fine this year.”

With this remark he took possession of her and Davie followed them to the table angrily. Crabs! To have to relinquish her to a person who talked to her about crabs! He was disdainful and gradually became morose.

Shaded lights glowed on the tables, and from where Virginia sat she could glimpse through the arching foliage the vast cool shimmer of the distant lake. And as she had requested, her straight back was turned to Mrs. Winfield Watson, a ubiquitous, pompous lady of great prominence socially, who had first opened her arms to Mrs. Bradford at the time of Louise’s marriage.

Virginia felt very happy. In the atmosphere of unqualified approval by which she was surrounded she lost the shadow of boyish shyness which sometimes even now lightly obscured her, and the presence of several admirers was always distinctly stimulating. A spirited realization of her ability to charm and of her beauty came to her. She thrilled to the knowledge and felt gay and glad to be alive. The dinner party, in no way affected by Davie’s despondency, went off with cheerful hilarity. When it was over they attempted to dance, but the heat proved too great even for their enthusiasm and they gradually drew together in the same group on the lawn.

The conversation soon exhausted itself and became,

Cousin Julia

as it often did, a mere dull commerce of personalities and gossip. A feeling of emptiness and boredom began to lay hold of Virginia. The cool glow of moonlight filled the night, and a noiseless breath of south wind moved steadily through the shadows and scarcely stirred the heavy foliage above them. Virginia was acutely conscious of it all, and of the fireflies and the scents of the sleeping earth. But this incessant tiresome talk! They were so small, so without effect, intention or result, the things they recounted here, with this brooding immensity about them.

"I'm going now," she announced suddenly. "It must be getting rather late."

There was a chorus of disapproval, but she persisted and Tom, with whom, as usual, she had come, rose to order his car brought round. It was the biggest and smartest and most powerful of those dashing racing runabouts very much affected at that time by heavily capitalized young men, that had come to Columbia and was, someone had said, quite the most fascinating thing about Tom. In a few moments they shot out of the driveway and Virginia waved good-by from the low seat to the others who had come out in tamer touring cars and who were in no hurry to get back to the dull heat of the city.

"Want to go right home, Virg?" Collingsworth inquired when they reached Highland Road. She shook her head and they turned away from town and flew down the straight, moonlit road that skirted the lake for twenty miles.

"Have a good time?" was his next remark.

"Oh, I don't know. Yes, I suppose so."

"I thought it was a fine party."

"Did you, Tom?"

Cousin Julia

"Uh huh. Bully!"

For some time, to the low overtone of humming machinery, they sped past the mist-hung lake without speaking. At last he smoothly lowered the speed of the car.

"Virgie!" he exclaimed, "why don't you make up your mind to marry me? We could have lots of fun."

"Heavens, Tom! Don't you ever think of anything but fun?"

"Of course I do. I spend most of my time thinking of things that are certainly not fun for me—or for the other fellow either. I can tell you that! Women no more realize," he complained boyishly, his intention diverted for the instant, "that men have to work!"

"Yes, I do. But I meant that besides business and pleasure there must be all sorts of other things——" she paused vaguely.

He looked at her somewhat puzzled.

"Of course there are," he answered tentatively.

"Very important things," she went on; "things that count."

"Well, what?" he demanded suspiciously. He always felt predisposed to combativeness when Virginia was in this mood, and to contradict her, having an obscure feeling that it was a mood inimical to him.

"Oh," she said, waving a slim hand, "I couldn't exactly say what they are. Don't you just feel them?"

"You talk like Davie," he replied scornfully, and then as a cold silence met this retort he said rather humbly:

"Maybe love is one of them, Virgie."

She softened. "Yes, I suppose it is." There was a little silence.

Cousin Julia

"O Lord!" he exclaimed presently, giving the brake an impatient prod with his foot, "I'm simply crazy about you, Virgie, and I don't know whether you care for me or not. I don't believe you do." And then, with recurring hope—"Do you?"

"I don't know, I'm sure, Tom. We'll just have to wait and see. I don't believe I really know what you mean by caring——"

"Just think," he said, pursuing his own thoughts, "we'd have houses of our own and dogs—any old thing you wanted and——"

"And parties all the time?" inquired the girl a trifle maliciously. She had forgotten the exhilaration of the early evening, and remembering only the subsequent dreariness, did not look forward to an endless career of such amusements with enthusiasm.

"Sure. We'd have it all, Virgie, youth and health and money, and there's nothing more than that to be had."

"I wonder," she said to herself, "if there isn't!"

He let the car come to a standstill and leaned over the wheel, looking into her face.

"You beauty!" he ejaculated, with passionate emphasis.

The exclamation gave Virginia a warm thrill of pleasure. She smiled at him slowly and he bent closer to her and put his arm about her shoulders. She liked feeling it there and a caprice seized her to yield ever so slightly to its pressure. In an instant she was crushed to him and he was seeking her lips. Virginia sprang back.

"No!" she exclaimed. "Oh, no! It was my fault, but you mustn't."

"Yes, it was your fault," he replied tensely. There

Cousin Julia

was a moment of silence. Then Collingsworth started his car and turned it slowly toward town.

Virginia was profoundly disturbed and she was equally puzzled. Why had she wanted his caress and hated it when it was given? Why did she shrink so from his kiss?—and yet his words, “You beauty!” choked as they were with feeling, had been sweet to her. They tore back over the white, deserted road and she sat by him in silence, filled with questionings.

When Virginia reached home she found with some surprise her mother waiting up for her. Mrs. Bradford shared all the extraordinary, and, to tell the truth, pretty well founded confidence the older generation of Americans feels in the ability of the younger to look after itself, and never assumed a vigilant attitude toward her daughter’s comings and goings.

“Have a good time, Virgie?” she inquired. She came into the girl’s room, and standing by the foot of the bed, tapped one of the thin mahogany posts lightly with her eyeglasses.

“Why, yes, Mother. Aren’t you up rather late?”

“I’ve been writing, writing letters to Paris.”

Mrs. Bradford could see wonderfully, but she could never hear, and she pronounced it “Parus” till the end.

“Anything new from Louise?”

“Nothing new, no.”

There was a pause. Virginia tossed her hat deftly across the room to a wicker chaise longue and stuck one of the pins in her cushion. The other fell to the floor, where she left it. Mrs. Bradford did not comment on this. She never bothered her family about small things except in questions of piety. In a moment Virginia’s outer garments collapsed limply on various

Cousin Julia

pieces of furniture and a cloud of black hair enveloped her shoulders.

"Tom bring you home?"

"Uh huh." This through lips tightly closed over the jeweled top of a comb.

Virginia had now perceived that her mother had something to talk to her about, so she thrust the comb through the front of her hair to keep it out of her eyes and slipped into a dressing gown. She then threw herself into an easy chair by the open window.

"Fire away, Mother."

"I came to talk to you about Tom, Virgie."

Virginia flushed. He seemed suddenly near to her again, as he had been in the car—his breath warm on her lips and a faint odor of smoke and Scotch whiskey in her nostrils. She did not speak.

"Of course I know he wants to marry you. He's always telling me that."

"Really?" Amused surprise was in her voice.

"Yes. He doesn't seem to have much else to say," said Mrs. Bradford simply.

"That's true enough," thought Virginia. "He's not very interesting," she said aloud.

"Oh, it's not that," her mother protested. "I guess he's interesting enough. Men aren't apt to be very interesting when they're so much in love," she added.

Virginia shrugged her shoulders.

"I hope, of course, you'll take him, Virgie."

Her bright eyes left off watching the tatooing of the bedpost and for the first time scanned her daughter. Virginia leaned forward and stared out into the whispering treetops, asking herself her mother's question.

She thought of that evening, of how he had looked coming down the club steps to meet her and Davie, so

Cousin Julia

big and heavy set—rather splendid looking—of her moment of vision and distaste out on the moonlit lawn and of that other moment in the car with him coming home. She told herself that he had brought no magic into her life, none of the breathless thralldom, the perfume, the witchery that are supposed to attend Love's pageant. Could this be romance—this nice comradeship involving automobiles and—soft-shelled crabs and endless larks together? Hardly. The fancy came to her that if Davie with his dreaming and Tom with his strength could be made into one that perhaps then—but she rejected it at once. Fused, why should they have what apart they so signally did not possess—the vital spark, the power to touch her spirit and make it live? She forgot them and let herself dream. She dreamed—as how many girls have not—of one whose flaming personality would enkindle hers, one who had thought and felt and dared, as she could never hope to, whose compelling hands could pour for her the deep wine of love. With her eyes still on the trees whose branches tossed like restless sleepers, Virginia finally answered her mother's question.

"Why, no," she said slowly, "I don't suppose I shall."

"Nonsense!"

The tone of this rejoinder startled Virginia. There was an edge to it she did not know and she looked at her mother in surprise. But whatever uncontrolled facial expression might have accompanied Mrs. Bradford's exclamation had been instantly suppressed. She crossed the room and sat down on the edge of a small straight chair, half turned from the dressing table, her back and head inflexibly upright.

"You must be crazy, Virginia," was her comment.

Cousin Julia

"There isn't a girl in the country but would jump at the chance."

"But I don't love him—I'm sure—I know I don't."

"You like him, don't you?"

"Yes, awfully."

"And trust him and respect him?"

"Yes."

"Then you feel as much as nine-tenths of the women you know feel toward their husbands after a year or two—a good deal more than some of them do, I guess."

"Mother, what a horrible thing to say!"

"Not at all. It's just plain sense."

Her words found no echo of conviction in Virginia's consciousness. Suddenly she inquired:

"But the other tenth?"

"I don't know's I believe in the other tenth."

"But, Mother," the girl persisted, "don't you believe there's such a thing as love?"

"Certainly. But," she permitted herself a stiff smile, "I guess my kind—the kind I believe in's different from yours. I believe if you marry a nice, decent man that you like and who can do everything in the world for you, you'll end by loving him. I believe in infatuation too, a silly kind of thing you can work yourself up to that can end in most anything, trouble generally."

"Well!" Virginia leaned back with a little gasp. Then whimsically, "You're not what could be called romantic, Mother, are you?"

Mrs. Bradford ignored this observation and directed her attention to her eyeglasses, which she held poised on the bureau top.

"I suppose the trouble is, with you," she went on at last, "you don't know what you're refusing. You've

Cousin Julia

always had everything so you don't realize the difference. Why, Virgie, marrying a man like that," her thin voice almost glowed, "you've just got everything people work and struggle for all their lives and don't get a millionth part of—you'd have the world at your feet!"

"I don't know that I want the world. It's a very tedious place, sometimes." Her voice trailed off indecisively and she thought to herself, "Maybe I'd rather like some of the stars and a poet to sing to me about them instead." Having thought this, she was amused at it. She even laughed a little at the high falutin'-ness of the fancy and at her mother's probable reception of it had she voiced it. As it was, Mrs. Bradford felt annoyed.

"I don't know what you meant by what you said just now, Virgie, and I don't believe you know yourself, or what you're laughing at. Marriage isn't a laughing matter."

"But since I'm not going to be married——"

"I hope you'll think that over, Virgie, and change your mind. I want you to think about it seriously and we'll speak of it again in a day or so."

Virginia yawned and stretched her slender bare arms above her head.

"Oh, let's forget about it. Everything is going along very pleasantly as it is."

"No, it isn't," said Mrs. Bradford, rising. "I don't like this kind of shilly-shallying; I want the matter to be settled." Her tone was sharp.

"But, Mother——"

"We won't talk about it any more tonight. Get to bed, daughter, and remember I expect you to make up your mind. It's gone on this way long enough."

Cousin Julia

She stood for an instant looking intently at Virginia as if yearning to force her volition into the girl so that it would act there in her way. It was simply inconceivable to her that Virginia should not desire to become Mrs. Tom Collingsworth. The éclat of the name meant as much to Mrs. Bradford as the money. She felt that this would be the supreme achievement of her career. It must be brought about. She seemed about to speak again, but changed her mind and closed her thin lips tightly. Virginia rose and kissed her mother good-night with a feeling of bewilderment.

She was at a loss to account for this determined and entirely unaccustomed interference in her affairs. Moreover, there seemed no occasion for the abrupt making of irrevocable decisions. She stood at the open window, leaning against the screen and making a little frame with her hands to take the reflection of the light from the wire so that she could look out into the shadowy garden. But she soon ceased to be conscious of the dim forms of trees and shrubs, or of the light restless breeze that moved like a gentle wraith wandering with sad draperies through the night. Her mind focused and she thought intently and introspectively. She thought of her own life and tried to analyze her place in it and her attitude toward it. It came to her at last—and she realized it acutely—how much it had only been a waiting, a gay interval which she had been able to enjoy while waiting. Waiting for what—for what great adventure? She grasped this new bit of consciousness eagerly and tried to hold the illusive thing and examine it. What had she expected? Love, doubtless, and what else—an awakening, an expression of herself, a something that would make her one with the reality, the terrible earnestness and splendor of

Cousin Julia

life? What a strange thing it was, this expectancy—so potent that it had molded herself and her life, so vague that until now it had pervaded her without her knowledge of it.

What is it, that golden cloud that hangs before the eyes of youth which sometimes lifts and does reveal a certain fulfillment—less in the having to be sure, but still a fulfillment—but more often dissolves into the drab mists of failure and nothingness when the poem of sheer youth is done? Must life ever be a looking forward and then a looking backward?—A springtime gay with vague hopes, and then at the given hour—and that hour is the passing of youth no matter how early or late it come—a realization and a wistful regret for that very looking forward, for the very delusion that the pomp and raptures of life are specially preparing for you?

XIX

IT was a luminous, sun-filled June day, high and cool, a day of waving treetops and little clouds like proud white feathers sailing across the face of the stark blue abyss. Virginia, from a reclining chair on the broad stone terrace of the house in Highland Road, watched them. It was a lovely, sheltered place on the opposite side of the house from the road. Below were the terraces of turf, gay with flowers and formal with clipped shrubs and flat marble steps.

It was unusual for Virginia to be at home at all on such an afternoon and if at home and alone not to be at the piano. Her playing had become more and more a precious reality in a world of bright shadows—work which she did happily and earnestly, accepting the drudgery for the stability of mood it induced. This unusual state of affairs was occasioned by the still more unusual circumstance of her father being at home and in bed. He had come in at noon looking very white and tired and had gone upstairs at once. He refused a doctor and Mrs. Bradford intelligently acquiesced in his refusal. She made him comfortable and left him to rest, but now, having gone in and found him awake and less beaten in manner, she sat down near him. Below, Virginia lay on the terrace and watched the bustling clouds, and upstairs Mrs. Bradford calculated deftly the few words she wanted to have with her husband.

“I guess you’re worried, Jim,” she remarked casually.

Cousin Julia

"I'm more tired than anything else, Mother," he replied.

She ignored this.

"Bills too big?"

J. C. was sitting propped up in bed, his white night-shirt neatly buttoned around his throat, his long, thin hands, scrupulously clean, folded before him. His head was held to one side, and his abundant hair was almost white and made little contrast to the pillow slip on which it rested.

"They're pretty big," he answered, staring over his steel-rimmed spectacles at the wall beyond. "But that's only an item. It's swinging the whole business that's been pretty hard lately. Times are bad, and just now it's all a question of credit."

Determination, weariness, and a touch of fear—it was less fear than the wisdom of experience—were in his face and his abstracted gaze.

"Your credit's always been good, Jim," she said firmly.

"Oh, yes. My personal credit is as good as any man's in town. But it's a big thing I've been working up lately. Had to be." He spoke quietly and closed his mouth grimly after the short syllables. It was as near a reproach, perhaps, as he had ever come. She nodded.

"Your personal standing is one thing," he went on half to himself, "and sometimes you're inclined to go too far on it. It don't count much nowadays compared with big financial pull." He paused. In all their life together he had never talked one-half so much business to her as today. He continued to stare at the wall.

"We're at a turning place," he went on. "We've

Cousin Julia

got good connections, of course—but are they good enough? This is such a big thing—do we dare go on? Yet, how can we go back?” He passed his hand nervously across his forehead. Mrs. Bradford saw that he was even more worried than he admitted.

“I oughtn’t to think about it now, Mother,” he went on. “I came home so’s to get away from it all; I’m not fit for it today.”

“That’s right, J. C., you’re not. Try and get a good rest so’s you will be when you go back. By the way,” she then said in a new tone, “you know young Collingsworth who’s been around here a good deal?”

“Collingsworth, of the Collingsworth Consolidated? Oh, yes, nice boy. Big concern, that.” J. C.’s speculative look returned.

“Well,” she went on in her matter-of-fact tone, “Tom’s a real fine young man and I expect he and Virginia will make a match of it.”

“You don’t say, Mother!” he exclaimed with sudden interest. “Is he all right, good enough for her?”

“You needn’t worry about that, Jim, and as for business—well,” she rose, “she’ll be well provided for, anyway.”

“Humph! I should say so,” said her father.

“It’ll be a good thing all round,” she pursued. “That connection ought to help us, Father——”

“It’s sure to. Only I wouldn’t think of that a minute if she didn’t love him,” he observed. “I wouldn’t have a girl of mine marry for money for all the business connections in the world. But Virginia isn’t that kind.” He paused and pulled off his bent steel spectacles. “She’s not that kind. Yes, that’s good news, Mother.”

He turned a more tranquil face to his pillow and remarked that he thought he could get a little sleep.

Cousin Julia

Mrs. Bradford regarded him calmly for an instant and then went in search of Virginia.

Virginia, delightfully idle, still watched with half-closed eyes the silly activities of the hurrying clouds. They seemed to her such helpless little earthlings to be treading the dreadful borderlands of space. Her mother spoke to her twice before she heard.

"Come in out of that glare, Virginia."

Mrs. Bradford stood in one of the long French windows that opened from the drawing-room on to the terrace. She had never seemed to care much for the terrace with its striped awnings and wicker and Chinese rugs.

"Oh, Mother, what for?" protested Virginia. Then, receiving no answer and sensing a severe look, she languidly arose and joined her mother in the luxurious desolation of the drawing-room.

Violet Tillinghurst's drawing-room, though on a smaller scale, had been very much the model for this one and had inspired the smothered tones of faded yellow and dull gold.

As she entered, Virginia was pervaded by a sense of something changed, of intensified values. There was in her mother's soldier-like attitude a quality of determination, new and portentous. She was struck by it and startled.

"Mother!" she exclaimed. "Nothing's the matter, is there? Father's all right?"

"Well, he's tired and worried, but he's not sick—yet."

Mrs. Bradford was dressed in a precise gown of white and black silk with touches of light blue. She didn't particularly like light blue, but it was a life-long

Cousin Julia

custom for her to have it on her gowns. It was the color she had worn as a girl and had used in ever-decreasing volume ever since.

"Go up and get my work, will you, Virgie? I left it on the hall table," she said; "and we'll sit here where it's cool. I feel one of my headaches coming on."

Mrs. Bradford's work consisted always of tatting. It was the only thing she had ever enjoyed doing with her hands and the girls little suspected how much of their futures hung around their white petticoats, woven into the prim pattern of their mother's handiwork. Then French embroidery came and irrevocably ousted tatting from their wardrobes and no one ever knew what became of the miles of it manufactured in later years.

"Virginia," said Mrs. Bradford, seating herself by a table and plunging simultaneously into her work and her subject, "I'm afraid you haven't paid much attention to our talk the other night about Tom, but I meant what I said. I want you two to come to an understanding."

Virginia moved impatiently in the big chair where she had buried herself.

"No girl ought to allow a man to monopolize her for three years the way you have, if she doesn't intend to marry him. And if she does, it's high time to do it."

"Very well, Mother," Virginia observed, "I'm not in love with Tom and I don't intend to marry him, so I'll just tell him so once and for all, if that's what you want."

"It's not what I want, as you know."

The girl shrugged her shoulders and thought, "I wish she'd let me alone. After all, it's I who have to marry him."

Cousin Julia

All her life Virginia had had her own way. Her desires had been, generally speaking, gratified; she had done what it pleased her to do and not done what she did not care to. It had never been required of her to consider anyone's else inclinations and she had never been called upon to make sacrifices. The result was, that she consulted her own pleasure solely—it simply didn't occur to her that there was anything else to be expected. In the present instance, she had come to the conclusion that, so far, she did not feel inclined to marry Tom and she had made that clear. The natural consequence would be for the whole matter to be dropped. Why wasn't it? She gave the bottom of the chair a little angry kick.

"Hasn't what I said to you made any difference? Doesn't my advice count for anything?"

"What has advice got to do with it, Mother? I've been trying to fall in love with him for three years and I just can't and that's an end to it."

Mrs. Bradford had no air of thinking that that was an end to it. The tating proceeded vigorously and presently she remarked:

"I'm worried about your father, Virgie."

"Oh, Mother!" Virginia's heart gave a throb of unexpected anguish. A feeling of wistful tenderness and sympathy existed between her and the silent, overworked father. "Daddy can't be really ill—why you just said——"

"It's work and worry mostly. Times are hard and you don't suppose a position like ours is kept up on nothing, do you?"

"Why do we keep it up?" demanded the girl.

Mrs. Bradford frowned. Here was an encroachment upon the holy of holies.

Cousin Julia

"Don't be silly, Virginia. Your father and I haven't spent our lives making things the way they are for you and Louise, to have it appreciated as little as that, I hope. Besides, don't you suppose our success means anything to us?"

"I'm afraid I haven't thought much about it."

"No, you're a very spoiled, ignorant girl, Virgie, who can only realize all you've had when you lose it."

Lose it! How strange everything was today! Her mother's severity had become almost inimical. Into the girl's supremely carefree life, a menace, a something relentless and inescapable, seemed to be slyly insinuating itself.

"Virginia, I have advised you, asked you to marry Tom Collingsworth. I believe with my whole heart that it's a wonderful thing for you. He's a good boy and I believe he'll make you very happy. Unless I thought that I wouldn't do as I'm doing—I hope you believe that. And now for your father's sake I'm going to demand that you marry him."

Something in Virginia seemed to reel from the sheer surprise of this. What an unbelievable thing this conversation of theirs was becoming! She felt that an intimacy of revelation, unprecedented between her cold, practical, outlooking mother and herself, was at hand. She felt, too, the incongruity of such intimacy in that large, unassimilated, beautiful room. They might have been in a hotel parlor—still that had some relation to her mother's peculiar personality too, she couldn't tell just what. A vision of the dining room in the old house in Chestnut Street presented itself to her mind. She saw the sewing machine and the red table cover. She even heard the loud old clock that ticked so pleasantly on snowy afternoons and the cat purring. She

Cousin Julia

felt sure they would say things here they would never have said in that room. Her great dark eyes were full on her mother's face. Mrs. Bradford looked up for an instant and then her glance fell to her tatting.

"Your father is no longer young, Virgie. He's carrying a big load and if anything should happen to him it's a question, not of losing something, but of losing everything—everything would go."

"But surely it's not so bad as that!"

"No one can tell. It's simply this—there is in these hard times a possibility that he might—might fail. If you were to marry Tom Collingsworth there would be no possibility of it, that's all."

"But why——"

Mrs. Bradford shook her head impatiently.

"You don't understand those things or the importance of such a connection," she added with exasperation, "either socially or financially."

Suddenly Tom, with his big, healthy body, his motor cars, his money, his love of pleasure and of eating, Tom who was being thrust, forced upon her, became intensely repellent to Virginia.

"But I can't, I can't!" she exclaimed, putting her hands before her eyes.

"You must." The tone was bitterly determined and Virginia realized that for the first time she saw her mother angry. "Listen to me, Virginia. You owe your father and me a debt and now is your chance to pay it off."

"What debt?" said the girl quickly. "I didn't ask you to bring me into the world."

"We didn't," said Mrs. Bradford crisply.

Virginia's hands fell from before her face and the two women stared into each other's eyes.

Cousin Julia

"We didn't," repeated Mrs. Bradford cruelly. "We took you when you were a little thing without a home and gave you everything." She made an awkward gesture with one of her hard, short-fingered hands.

Still Virginia stared.

"You—you are a connection of my sister's," Mrs. Bradford went on; "I took you. J. C. didn't altogether want it, but I did it anyway. He's been more than a father to you, and I guess now you won't feel like refusing to pay him back."

Virginia rose giddily to her feet.

"No," she murmured. "No, I won't refuse." And still looking into Mrs. Bradford's unspeaking eyes, she wondered if below her steady regard lay any realization of the ugliness of what she had just done.

ON the day of their revealing conversation, Virginia and her mother did not meet again until dinner time. She had made her way upstairs rather dazedly, and put on her hat, with a vague desire to go to Frau von Ernst. But, although she went out, she did not go to see her friend. In the confused surprise which had invaded her, she could think of nothing but what had just happened, and of that she did not yet know what she thought. She had formed no opinions, and had not, of course, as yet achieved an attitude of mind toward it. She could have spoken of nothing else, and yet, could she have spoken of that—even to Frau von Ernst?

There were many things for her to consider before she faced the frank and sensitive friendship of the older woman. So she walked, instead, far out Highland Road, absorbed in her new knowledge, trying to free from it the bitterness that had risen in her at the crude coerciveness of Mrs. Bradford's methods, and considering her promise. She had promised to marry Tom!

When she went down to dinner that night, she found her mother already at the table. It was set for three. A painful embarrassment seized Virginia, but Mrs. Bradford apparently felt, or at least displayed, none. She touched upon the subject at once.

"Your father's coming down, Virgie," she remarked. "He's like a new man since he heard about you and Tom. I don't know when anything's pleased him so."

Cousin Julia

"Oh, you've told him already!" A feeling of deadly irrevocableness took her by the throat. The finality of the thing, then, had not entirely possessed her that afternoon. Perhaps she had still hoped——

"Yes, and it's done him a world of good. I hope you won't undo it, Virgie, by speaking to him about those notions of yours the way you did to me." There was a pause. Virginia was thinking of something she wanted to ask her mother, and she made no remark. "I know it's natural for you to have them, but there's nothing in them, my child, just sentimental nonsense. You're a very lucky girl."

"Did you," Virginia began with difficulty, not looking at her mother, "did you tell him that you had told me——" her embarrassment overcame her, and she found herself unable to go on.

Mrs. Bradford understood.

"I told him nothing," she replied evenly, "except that you and Tom were about to become engaged. You needn't speak to him about anything else."

Then J. C. came into the room. His steel-rimmed spectacles sat halfway down his nose, and he looked at the two women over them, silently and kindly. He was very thin, Virginia noticed, and above his short, grizzled beard his face rose white and shrunken. He laid his hand on her as he passed her, and she turned impulsively, and kissed and clung to him.

They sat down to the table in silence. The servant was quietly placing the soup plates, when Mrs. Bradford observed,

"Louise and her husband are coming out to visit us, and I think I'll have a reception for them and for you and Tom at the same time, Virgie."

So here was another of her broadsides! The girl

Cousin Julia

was not too surprised to feel, instantly, a certain calculation in it all. The young distrust of her mother, born that afternoon, grew stronger. Why had she not told them this as soon as she had known it herself? Why had she seemed to have so carefully settled the other matter first? Had she had any reason for doing so?

Virginia had seen practically nothing of Lorme since Louise's marriage. The only time she had visited her sister he had been in England, and one or two casual meetings were the sum of their intercourse. For more than three years they had not met at all. She was surprised at the variety of feeling the knowledge of his arrival invoked. His place in her consciousness was, after all, very small, and was a memory, not of fact, but of feeling. She recalled his personality and what had happened between them very vaguely, but she remembered a hurt. And, somehow, it seemed strange that his return into her life should be coincident with her betrothal to another man; perhaps, she even permitted herself to fancy, in a sudden access of contemptuous exaggeration, dependent upon it—the great expense of the journey not to be added, in these hard times, to Louise's large, and always overdrawn drafts on her father, unless the Bradford feet were set on firmer financial ground than they now seemed to be treading. Doubtless the Lorme luxury would increase in many ways, now that she was being made to marry a rich man!

Virginia was appalled at the inflammability of conclusions. The flame of suspicion lighted in her that afternoon leaped from one surmise to another, and the conflagration illumined her world with a rather unbeautiful light.

XXI

IT was a Sunday morning. Sunday was very much Sunday in Columbia, and nowhere more so than in the Bradford household. Mrs. Bradford had imported with her French tapestries and Italian linen no foreign ideas on that subject. On this particular Sabbath, Virginia passed her mother's door, dressed, contrary to all precedent, in a riding habit.

"Virginia!" exclaimed Mrs. Bradford in astonishment, "do you know what day this is?"

"Yes, Mother, but I thought——"

"And besides you wouldn't be back in time for church, it's nine o'clock now."

"I thought today you wouldn't mind. I'm going with Tom—you know I haven't seen him yet." Her cheeks were scarlet as she said this.

For a moment there was no sound but the click of Mrs. Bradford's new shoes being buttoned and the creaking of her stiff corset as she bent down to them—she couldn't endure the ministrations of a maid. Then she straightened up.

"All right," she said, somewhat breathlessly. "I don't care for this time. But you know I think it's queer to ride horseback on Sunday. It doesn't seem right. Go on, though."

Mrs. Bradford could not conceive of any self-respecting person remaining away from church on Sunday morning. Every Sunday morning of her life, unless physically unable, she had rustled off, specially attired, to increasingly fashionable places of worship.

Cousin Julia

She always wore silk on these occasions and new shoes, and carried her money for the collection in the palm of her hand under her glove, as she didn't feel it to be quite the thing to take a pocketbook to divine service.

Virginia often recalled as she accompanied her—J. C. rarely went with them any more—the remote Sunday mornings in the old house in Chestnut Street, of which certain unrelated details remained with startling freshness in her mind. She remembered the peculiar smoothness and tightness with which their mother braided their hair; and how splendid she always seemed to them in her stiff silk dress with a high collar and shiny, light brown gloves; and how they all, including their father, wore a little bouquet pinned to their breast, consisting of a leaf of sweet geranium and a sweet pea. To this day she never smelled a rose geranium without seeing the small procession as it moved from the house, Louise walking primly ahead with her mother, and behind, her father in a long frock coat and herself beside him holding his hand. She had always, she remembered, quarreled with Louise with unusual violence on Sunday, and had once been so goaded to fury by the latter's sweetness and light that she had thrown a heavy glass paper weight at her, which had mercifully missed its mark.

Reminiscences, however, had no part in her thoughts today. They were full of the eventful present. She believed she had not slept at all the night before, and had had, as a matter of fact, only five, instead of the usual eight hours of slumber. But during the wakeful interval she had thought a great deal, and had ended by adjusting herself, to a certain extent, to the new conditions. She was sorry to find that her great af-

Cousin Julia

fection for J. C. was not founded on a real relationship, but as for Mrs. Bradford, she realized she had never felt for her what girls probably felt for their mothers, and did not in the least mind losing her in that capacity. Concerning herself and Tom, her feelings were confused, but she tried to make them optimistic. She had promised her mother to marry him, and it seemed to be her duty to go on with it. Perhaps, after all, she said to herself, the kind of love she had expected really did not exist, or was, as her mother had said, unimportant and fleeting. He was companionable and cheerful, and though not handsome, he was big and agreeable physically. And she was naturally not indifferent to the fact that he was spectacularly rich.

She recalled the quality of their companionship, his enjoyment of gayeties which so often seemed to her monotonous and futile, and in which she sensed an underlying dreariness. She knew his world to be one of business and sport, proper clothes, good food, certain affections and good fellowship, and of absolutely nothing more. She had not aspired to a life lived on this flatly materialistic plane, but she was young enough to hope that through the mystery and intimacy of marriage she could perhaps change him, fire him with her enthusiasms and endow him with her sensibilities.

She thought a great deal, too, of Louise's return with Félix, and tried to imagine having her and her husband with them in Highland Road, but could not picture it. And that it should happen that he, that Félix—who had stirred in her the strange tumult of a first awakening passion—should be coming back into her life just at this moment, still seemed to her remarkable, gave her, as coincidences often do to the

Cousin Julia

young, a sense of destiny. She wondered if it would seem so to him, too, but told herself that that was absurd. As he had never seen her in any other light than as Louise's sister, her marriage would appear to him merely a quite natural, if somewhat belated, event. And from all these simmering considerations rose a vapor of purely youthful excitement at the new things that were happening to her.

Virginia rode well. Cross-saddle riding had not yet begun to be generally popular, and a slender figure might still achieve grace and distinction in the perversely elegant sidesaddle.

It was a quiet, expansive June day, a day when nature wore the look of a full breasted mother turning to her child a face of smiling beneficence. They both responded to its tranquil beauty. Tom, straight and big on his fine horse, enjoyed the country and the warm air, sweet with occasional willful gusts of clover, and thought what an agreeable thing it was to have a daintily stepping thoroughbred between his knees, and a pretty girl like Virginia to look at. He also thought of how pleasant a needle shower would feel when he got back, and decided that he would have a broiled steak with bacon at the club, unless Virginia invited him to dinner.

"How on earth did you get a Sunday off?" he asked her.

"It's nice, isn't it?" she answered evasively.

They were well into the country and the roads were deserted except for an occasional farm wagon on its way to church, laden with the farmer's family in unnatural Sunday clothes. The children were plentiful and all had tow heads and red faces. Green, shiny fields

Cousin Julia

were about them, and on a nearby hill five tall poplars lent some unexplained significance to a low farmhouse. The horses, with wet hides and foaming bridles, pressed close to each other, curving their necks and lifting high their feet in the thrall of a naïve and winning vanity.

"It's nice, all right," he went on, "but I don't see how you had the nerve to ask your mother. She's a peach, but she has me thoroughly quelled."

Virginia felt inclined to laugh at this, but did not do so. She was nervously anxious to get it over with. She replied seriously,

"She likes you."

"Does she?" There was instant interest and pleasure in his voice. Tom was very susceptible to praise. "I think *she's* fine."

When Virginia spoke again her voice was lower and more hesitating:

"You know, Tom, she thinks that you and I see too much of each other unless I——" Her face flushed, but she raised her eyes to him resolutely.

"Oh, Virgie," he exclaimed, pulling in his horse, "why don't you! If you knew how much I wanted you to!"

"Perhaps——" she said, the color deepening in her cheeks—"perhaps I will."

Astonishment at this unexpected avowal left him for a moment speechless. Then——

"Do you mean it?" he cried.

"Yes," she murmured.

For a moment more surprise alone held his gaze. Then realization came. He enveloped her flushing face and black-clad figure in a new regard, and grasping her reins, and the hand that held them, in his, flung an

Cousin Julia

arm about her and pulled her toward him. She wanted, vaguely, to resist but knew she could not, and he kissed her.

For a seering, dizzying eternity she was crushed against him, and then her horse started sideways and dragged her from his arms. Tom uttered a joyous whoop and threw his cap into the air, catching it dexterously on his head as it came down. Virginia was dazed and giddy. Her heart was thumping wildly and she felt for a moment as if she would lose her balance.

"You darling, darling beauty!" Tom was ejaculating. "How did you come to do it?"

And Virginia replied vaguely, "I want to go back by the lake road, Tom; is it too far?"

"I wish I could lift you out of that saddle and carry you back!" he exclaimed passionately. "Virgie, you're so far away! Why did you tell me on this confounded road!"

Before them was a small stretch of woods. Virginia saw them and was afraid he would want to kiss her again in their shelter, kiss her as he had just done. She gave rein to her horse.

"Let's race," she said.

"Not now," he protested. But she was already gone and there was nothing for it but to let his impatient horse spring after hers. They reached the crest of the long slope on which he had overtaken her neck and neck. Gradually the horses relaxed their speed, not, however, without each watching the other warily to see that the tacit agreement to slow down was being kept, and at last they were walking. The road now lay downward, and in the distance stood a small, white-painted church. It was there the lake road branched off.

Cousin Julia

"Give me your hand, sweetheart," he said to her; "I want to kiss it."

Virginia smiled at him, pleased with the homage in his voice. It occurred to her, too, that just now she would rather give him her hand than her lips. Perhaps she would feel differently about that later. She held it out to him. He kissed the gloved fingers smelling of warm, expensive leather and laid them against his cheek. Still she smiled, tasting the pleasure of receiving his love.

They soon came to the crossroads and to the little church where service was being held. Various conveyances stood about, hitched in the shade of the surrounding elms, and from within came the sound of singing.

"Let's look in," said Virginia, touched by the quaint inharmonies of the uncertain singers and the stout independence of the organist who refused to give either aid or quarter to the voices, and shrilled her accompaniment on a melodeon in relentless tempo, strong in the knowledge that she was reproducing what was in the book.

Collingsworth agreed, and Virginia slipped from her horse, and throwing the bridle over her arm, quietly approached one of the windows at the back of the church. Together they stood looking in at the standing congregation.

"We shall meet," sang the wavering sopranos and the bassos hastened to repeat, "We shall meet," and then together they proceeded, "We shall meet on that beautiful shore," with a final "We shall meet" hastily added by the low voices, hoarse and uncertain, but eager to get there on time, and pleased at the little elaboration of the parts. Over and over they sang it,

Cousin Julia

with varying combinations, not often in tune, but always valiant and melancholy.

Aside from the children ranged on a bench by themselves, the worshipers all seemed to Virginia to be old. The men had grizzled beards, and a poor knob of hair, thin and streaked with white, stuck out from beneath the unlovely bonnets of the women. This had been a bitterly hard country to farm, and these were the pioneers. The backs facing her were all bent, and the misshapen hands that held the hymn books spoke of ceaseless, grinding toil.

It occurred to Virginia that these people were not really here to thank God for anything in this life, but to remind themselves that there was perhaps another one, one not made up, as was this, of work and poverty and partings. She felt that the best life might have to offer some people was the hope of its ending so that they might get away into another. She wondered if absolute conviction was mingled with the sadness with which they sang of that meeting on a beautiful shore, if they had all lost something so dear that they must believe in a reunion to be able to go on, and what mother or father or little child death had snatched from each of these poor lives.

The singing stopped, and slowly the congregation settled to its knees. The minister began to pray. It was a sad prayer, a tragic one it seemed to the girl, who was a stranger to pain and had never looked on poverty, renunciation or death. It told one to accept them all for the good of the soul, and to live in the glory of what was to come, and from the bowed men and women came, at every moving passage, deep and fervent amens.

As she listened, a new thing came to Virginia. She

Cousin Julia

was filled with a fear of life. A fear of poverty, of sickness, of loneliness, of seeing herself bereft of everything but a desperate belief, a tear-dimmed hope of another shore where love and joy would be hers. She turned from the window, afraid and rebellious.

"But I have it all here," she assured herself, "all the good things of this world." And she wondered how she could ever have despised them—have thought that anything mattered but safety and the warm, creature comforts of this earth.

She walked up on to the sun-drenched road and turned to watch Tom, who followed her. She thought of the bent shoulders, the wan profiles, and the knotted fingers she had seen, and compared them to his sumptuous youth.

"Tom," she exclaimed, thrusting her hand through his arm and looking up at him, "I'm glad that I'm going to marry you!"

He took her roughly in his arms and kissed her, and she forgot to care whether they could be seen.

"We must go to Liebe Frau on the way," she murmured, when he released her. "I think I can tell her now."

XXII

FRAU VON ERNST'S garden was as gay with color as a fresh-painted toy. Apple-green and yellow, and bands of bright purple where the irises stood, like massed soldiers, and the rose-red of heavy peonies, unfolding their very souls to the June sunshine, made a setting as clean as a whistle from the recent rains and as bright as a cockatoo. The warm Sunday morning found the lady of the garden sitting on the dazzling lawn in the shade of an elm tree, under which most of her summer was lived, talking to Haslip. She was dressed in white, and her wavy white hair was combed high as usual.

The old, brown dog of the bald spots had died several years before, but his son, himself a person of advanced age, survived, and at present lay on the grass near his mistress. Over him stood a smaller dog, with a weazened, yellow face, and a fat, round, black body, unnaturally surmounting thin, yellow legs. He was very old, but incorrigibly playful, and was just now eying his companion wistfully, trying, by an occasional yelp and a stiff little leap into the air, to incite him to a romp.

Frau von Ernst watched them with amusement. At last she spoke to him:

"John is much too lazy to play with you, poor dear."

At the sound of her voice, the little dog bounded over to her as fast as his rigid, rheumatic joints would

Cousin Julia

permit him, and standing before her, looked up adoringly into her face. She laid her hand on his sharp little muzzle sprinkled with gray, and his cold nose touched wetly the under part of her wrist.

The Doctor had, earlier in the forenoon, been reading to her from the morning paper, but they had soon finished with it, and it had lain for some time now neatly folded at his feet. And Haslip, sitting erect, with crossed arms, his thick, curly, gray hair rising straight from his broad forehead, had been thinking. It was the peace and beauty by which he was surrounded that had furnished him a topic. He was the type of person who cannot feel himself happy and well favored of fate without at once asking himself, "Why should I have this, and not others? Why should at least the framework of joy not be given to everyone? Of course, each man builds his own weal or woe to a large extent, but why is there not more equality in the distribution of the tools?"

They discussed the subject intermittently, pleasantly, never agreeing, but interested in the unreconcilable differences of their points of view. Frau von Ernst thought with a rigid intensity—perhaps she felt rather more than she thought, which made the lens through which she viewed life a personal one—with an intensity that left her more or less incapable of submitting and molding her decisions to the opinions of others. Through a mist of idealism she saw, primarily, the individual, Haslip the race. His angle was historic and biological. He considered yesterday, today and tomorrow with an impersonal breadth that was essentially modern. Humanity, with a capital H, bestrode his theories. The paradise toward which he had set his face was one of economics, hers one of feeling.

Cousin Julia

Each considered the other a theorist, impassioned and impractical.

"Well, at any rate," he exclaimed at last, "I think the only really discouraging form of human nature is the perfectly odious, well provided for man or woman who, though having to admit that there is terrible suffering and economic wrong in the world, is yet absolutely livid with rage at the mention of a change, furious with anyone who would even try to improve things! Selfish, short-sighted, crawling things, with their bellies in the mud!" wound up the Doctor with an angry laugh.

His companion surveyed him with amusement. His florid, English face was quite pink with the intensity of his emotion.

"Is it poor Panot you're inveighing against in that vivid, I might say inelegant, way, my dear Haslip?" she asked with a quizzical smile.

"Oh, Heavens, no! Panot lives in a medieval dream. He never thinks at all. Instead he has a confused feeling for the purple, and a quite reasonless contempt for his century, which is probably his form of protest against the little that modern civilization has done for him. No, you know the type I mean."

She nodded.

"Now, I have a working theory myself," he observed.

"A workable one, Doctor?" she inquired, twinkling.

"Yes," he replied, getting up, and standing before her with his hands thrust under the tails of his cut-away. "A practical one—practical, that is, in a couple of hundred years when universal education——"

She threw back her head and laughed heartily.

"Practical in two hundred years! Oh, Haslip, what

Cousin Julia

am I to do with Panot a century behind and you a century or two or three ahead of the times!"

He smiled and was about to continue when the thud of horses' hoofs on the hard dirt pavement outside caught their attention.

"It couldn't be Virginia," said Frau von Ernst; "this is Sunday."

"That's just who it is, though," cried Haslip heartily, when Virginia and Tom appeared in the driveway. "Well, this is splendid!"

The dogs, fired with excitement at this un hoped for commotion, and barking loudly, made their way over to investigate the horses as fast as their physical disabilities would permit. Virginia slipped from her mount, and came across the lawn.

"Why, my dear child!" exclaimed the older woman. "What an agreeable surprise this is!"

"Yes," she laughed, "I knew you wouldn't expect me Sunday—on horseback."

They were both standing, and Frau von Ernst had her arm about Virginia. The girl laid her head on her friend's shoulder, and her hot cheek touched the cool one bent above her.

"I'm afraid it was too warm for you, riding in the sun," Liebe Frau said, patting the burning cheek solicitously.

"Oh, no," said Virginia, drawing away from her, "I'm all right." She greeted the Doctor, of whom she was very fond, with affection.

Tom, meanwhile, turned the horses over to the stable boy, who walked them slowly back and forth in the graveled driveway, and joined the little group on the lawn. He looked, Haslip thought, big and possessive and pleased with life. He and the Doctor immediately

Cousin Julia

began discussing the crops and how good the effect upon them would be of the recent happy combination of warm days and rainy nights. Virginia sat down a little apart and—which was most unusual for her—scarcely spoke. She seemed abstracted, but at last, disregarding a question of Frau von Ernst's, said,

"We can only stay for a moment, Mother won't like it if we're late for dinner. I—we only came, Liebe Frau, to tell you that we're engaged."

"What!" exclaimed the older woman. "Who? Virginia, what do you mean?"

The Doctor and Tom had stopped talking, and Haslip stared at her in amazement.

"Tom and I, of course," pursued the girl. "We've decided to get married."

"Oh, Virginia!" exclaimed Frau von Ernst, after a moment of amazed silence. "What a way to tell me! I—of course, I'm delighted, but you've been so abrupt, and it's such serious, overwhelming news!"

"Why so serious, Liebe Frau darling?" answered Virginia, jumping up. "But we'll go now and let you get used to it. You and Dr. Haslip can think up all sorts of congratulations to give us next time we come." She turned to Collingsworth, "Come along, Tom, we're late now."

She backed away, and was about to wave good-by, when Frau von Ernst, who had risen too, caught her hand.

"Virginia, you impossible child!" she cried. "Do you realize what you've just told me, and what it means to people who love you? Come kiss me," she drew the girl to her, "and, Tom, give me your hand."

Dr. Haslip had just been shaking hands with him and slapping him on the back, and now Tom held out

Cousin Julia

his hand to Frau von Ernst. She took it and looked up at him, and the tears filled her eyes.

"Oh, Tom, Tom!" was all she could say.

He flushed with embarrassment and the delight of his new happiness, and putting her hands to his lips, kissed them.

"There, you see," said the girl, giving a little strained laugh, "you see what a nice thing he is!" She slipped her arm through his and pulled him away.

"*Au revoir* to both of you dears!" she cried, and in a moment, from the back of her fretting horse, she was waving good-by. Her eyes were wide and starry with excitement, and the line of her red lips was a trifle hard with determination.

Frau von Ernst watched them canter down the driveway and then turned to her friend, and the tears that were in her eyes overflowed and ran down her cheeks. They looked at each other for a moment.

"Come, come, Caroline. You're not grieving, are you? I daresay he's a very fine fellow; seems to be."

"No, I'm not grieving, I'm only—well—taken off my feet," she replied thoughtfully. "It was such a strange way, so unlike Virginia, to have told me. Think, Haslip, after all these years, for her to fall in love, to have that wonderful thing happen to her, and never hint to me, never let me guess it till she is actually engaged! And then to have blurted it out as she might have done to anyone! It's really very strange."

She sat down, and the Doctor, seeking her permission mutely, filled his pipe and lit it. Presently she murmured,

"In love—to think of little Virginia in love!"

"That," said the Doctor, "is precisely what she is not."

Cousin Julia

She looked up at him quickly, and their eyes met and held each other.

"She would never have treated the whole thing as she did if she were in love, you know. When Virginia loves, it will take her very hard," he commented.

There was an interval of silence.

"You are always right, Haslip," she said at last. "That, of course, explains it. I would have known it, unseeing as I am, if she had been. And yet—Virginia about to marry a man she doesn't love—it seems incredible. I'm afraid, Doctor, I'm afraid!"

XXIII

VIRGINIA'S gone out," Mrs. Bradford said, coming into the drawing-room where Frau von Ernst was seated.

"I knew she would not be at home," the latter replied, holding out her hand; "that's why I came this morning."

She was dressed smartly, in black, and wore a close-fitting black hat that becomingly emphasized the distinction of her well-set head. As a young woman she had been handsome, though of a type too virile, perhaps, for real beauty, with her strong features, intensity of expression and smoldering eyes. But such beauty as had been hers still remained to her, and she was a trifle vain of her appearance. She liked looking well and being told that she did. Mrs. Bradford's stout figure was clad in a white shirt waist with a stiff linen collar, and a short walking skirt. Her face seemed thinner and less in proportion than ever. She was carrying a handful of letters, and her rimmed eyeglasses dangled from a long, black ribbon.

She took Frau von Ernst's hand as though she didn't quite know what it was, and didn't in the least care—a manner of shaking hands peculiar to her. This greeting was apt to be disconcerting to the recipient, but Mrs. Bradford was so coolly and unconsciously self-possessed that no one remained embarrassed for long in her presence.

"You're looking real well," she observed, sitting

Cousin Julia

down on the edge of a small chair, and taking hold of her eyeglasses.

"Oh, thank you," said the older woman; "I'm so glad you think so. I came, Julia, to have a little talk with you. But, shall we sit here?"

"Why not?" returned Julia Bradford, inexorably.

She was always supremely indifferent to her surroundings. The lights and odors of a railway restaurant would be neither more nor less restful to her, neither more nor less conducive to intimacy, than the silence and shadows of her own perfect library.

"It seems so large," murmured the other indecisively. She glanced about the great drawing-room, with its wide doorways and French windows opening on every side, and then sat down as near Mrs. Bradford as she could.

"It's about Virginia," she began.

Mrs. Bradford folded one arm in front of her, and, propping the other one upon it, silently tapped her chin with her eyeglasses. Frau von Ernst wished she wouldn't.

"She came to see me yesterday with Tom," she went on, "to tell me about it. Julia, I don't believe Virginia is in love with him."

"Did she say so?"

"Dear me, no. But I felt it. It wasn't hard to see."

A look of something like relief, a lightening of her expression, was visible in Mrs. Bradford's face. She even smiled.

"You were always a great one to imagine things, Caroline," was her comment.

A flash of impatience shot from Frau von Ernst's dark eyes, and was quickly suppressed.

"One could never arrive at truth without imagina-

Cousin Julia

tion," she observed sententiously, conscious as she did so of how completely her meaning would remain unperceived.

"Well, I never heard that before," said Mrs. Bradford with polite but ironic finality.

The other woman waived this issue, and after a moment she repeated:

"I know she doesn't love him, and I can't think why she got herself engaged to him. It's not like her," she added, scrutinizing the face of her companion.

"I don't see how anything better could happen to her," said the latter.

"If she doesn't love him!" exclaimed Frau von Ernst.

"Oh, I guess that part of it's all right."

"This is hopeless," thought Frau von Ernst, with a feeling of half-humorous annoyance.

"But if she doesn't!" she persisted. "You see I'm so sure of it that I wanted to make you realize it, and to beg you to try and influence Virginia." She spoke persuasively. "You could advise her, at least, to think it over again. He is so little suited to her, so entirely unfitted, it seems to me, to understand her and give her the things she most needs."

"I don't know what you mean, I'm sure, but I approve of this match in every way, Caroline, and there's no use in talking about it."

"But don't you care whether Virginia loves the man she is going to marry? Don't you see she might do this thing thoughtlessly, without realizing the utter finality of it?"

"She's grown up; she did it herself. She must be fond of him or she wouldn't have done it, and he's a good man and a splendid match. That seems about enough, to me."

Cousin Julia

Mrs. Bradford spoke kindly, but wearily. That there should be any question about it struck her as being unbelievable. Frau von Ernst felt that she was taking the wrong line. A new phase of the situation occurred to her.

"But have you considered Virginia's nature? She's more than usually intense, more—well—more passionate, and self-willed. She doesn't love Tom, but it's very possible that she may love someone else. What if that came after"—she hesitated and a curious little flush crept into her face, but after a moment's hesitation she finished—"after she was married; what then, Julia?"

"I guess I've brought my children up to be decent," she said dryly.

"Yes, yes, of course." Frau von Ernst hastened to placate her. "But then you've deprived her of life's greatest adventure—love."

"I have?" questioned the other grimly. She felt that a great fuss was being made over nothing, and was astonished that a person of Frau von Ernst's age and apparent intelligence should be capable of taking such sentimental considerations seriously. As for the latter, she wondered, suddenly, why she had come. She had known what to expect, and yet she had felt she must talk it over, must try, at least, to prevent it. She half rose to go, and then reseated herself. A vision of Virginia, sensitive, high-strung, capable of so much happiness or unhappiness, rose before her. She recalled her, too, as she had been the day before, excited, unlike herself, and with a new, curious hardness.

No misgivings as to the importance of all this visited her. Love, happiness, development, were far more

Cousin Julia

definite, concrete things to her than they are to most people who have lived long enough to behold the endless compromise, the melting outlines of human affairs, the incalculable mutability of the human heart. They were ideas about which most of her meditations centered and upon which the firmest of her theories were builded. The present situation was the very nut for those theories to crack. Perhaps for the moment she was, unconsciously of course, as interested in the theoretic as in the personal aspect of it. She now sought some new avenue of approach that would lead her a little nearer the formidable citadel of this other and alien consciousness.

"Julia," she said after a pause, "you want Virginia to be happy, don't you?"

"I think I've shown that," said the other significantly.

"Yes, you have," assented Frau Von Ernst with warmth. "But think, haven't you—haven't you by now found that it's not what you *have* that makes you happy, but what you *feel*?"

Mrs. Bradford's lips tightened with annoyance. The discussion was, she felt, perfectly futile, and besides, she was entirely unaccustomed to having her feelings discussed in any way. It was all embarrassing and irrelevant.

"You say that because you've always had plenty of money," she observed dryly.

"But look about you!" exclaimed the other. "Look at the merely rich women we know, the ones who we know married without love! How bored many of them are, how they crowd their lives with artificial activities and how empty they remain of warmth and achievement and peace!"

Cousin Julia

"The poor ones are the same, only with more worries."

"That may be, but there's no reason to suppose that all of them married for love either, or have supremely congenial husbands. Of course a certain amount of money is important; it's absolutely necessary. But Virginia would always have that. It's the vast superfluity that doesn't matter. And to Virginia, who is so sensitive, so intelligent and so creative, it would mean less than to most."

The word creative caught Mrs. Bradford's wandering attention.

"She can play the piano as much as she wants to if she marries Tom. His money won't keep her from doing any of the things she likes to do."

"But she'll have no inspiration."

Mrs. Bradford could not bring herself to answer this. It struck her as being really too far-fetched. But presently she remarked:

"There can always be children. I don't know whether that amounts to much in your theories, though."

Frau von Ernst found herself, absurdly enough, becoming rather angry at this, and the complete misapprehension, moreover, dismayed her. Reckless of increasing it, she retorted:

"Yes, I know that's the usual idea. To fill a fundamentally empty life with children whom you will bring up to get as little out of life as their parents—to in turn contract marriages whose only excuse will be more children. And so on, an endless circle! Having learned nothing different yourself, you will teach them everything except to feel!"

"People don't have to be taught to feel, I hope."

Cousin Julia

"But they do—to feel beauty and truth and the mystery and importance of being alive, to feel big things, to aspire!" Carried away by her pet theory, she forgot for a moment her errand and her audience.

"This is a nation or an age, I don't know which, without ideals or with only one—*money*, in useless quantities, material possessions. It's the same thing everywhere. The successful writer or painter or musician is the one who makes money. The successful mother is the one who marries her daughter to the richest man. Loneliness, deterioration, divorce, may follow such a marriage, but they don't count if only she's rich enough."

Perhaps just here Mrs. Bradford experienced an instinctive throb of sympathy.

"The modern mother," Frau von Ernst went on, "not only doesn't look for the real marriage of the mind and the heart and the soul, she doesn't even believe in it, any more than the modern carpenter aspires to create beauty and evolve a new and beautiful chair or a perfect table leg. His only dream is to become a rich contractor!"

Mrs. Bradford permitted herself to smile.

"I think anybody'd be crazy who wouldn't rather get rich than create a table leg." Now that the conversation seemed to have left important, personal matters, she could afford to be amused at Frau von Ernst's well-known extravagances.

"But the creating would bring him a thousand times more happiness than the money. Has your wealth ever given you the joy that creating Louise gave you?"

She spoke earnestly still, but the waves of her enthusiasm were receding, and she saw the absurdity and

Cousin Julia

humor of the situation. In fact she was a little shame-faced when she told the Doctor about it later on.

"Of course I made a fool of myself," she said, with a reminiscent and sorrowing laugh. "I wonder what she thought I was talking about!"

He shook his head at her.

"You're a hopeless idealist, Caroline, and an impractical one. You know I have a theory——"

"That I take myself too seriously?"

"Well," he laughed, "not yourself, perhaps, but all these Utopian ideas of yours."

"You have dreams yourself, you know."

"Yes, about economics, not about sentiments. Although I don't take Julia Bradford's side—still, there are greater tragedies than love, or lovelessness—pain and poverty are the real ones after all."

"But when they're done away with by your socialism and eugenics——"

"Then, it will be time for your problems, Caroline," he replied, feeling that he had scored.

She was a little angry with him, and felt that he had failed her. His utilitarianism, broad and fine as it was, made him insensible to close at hand problems, she felt. Panot's romanticism would have been more sympathetic.

"Well, well, that's all beside the question," she said. "At any rate, I didn't accomplish anything. I feel, somehow, that it's all Julia Bradford's doing, but it wouldn't have done any good to have let her see that I thought so. We would only have been rude to each other."

"Talk to Virginia."

"No," replied Frau von Ernst. "You know, considering all the circumstances, how impossible it is for

Cousin Julia

me to interfere, and Mrs. Bradford is clever enough to know that I wouldn't."

"She is a curious woman."

"Very. She's hard, but she's not petty. She could have silenced me so easily if she had chosen, and it would have hurt. But she didn't stoop to do it."

"She didn't have to," was his comment, rather dryly given. "She's not petty enough to do it wantonly, but if it *had* been necessary——"

Frau von Ernst sighed, and made a gesture of dismissal.

"Let's go out into the garden——"

"'And sit upon the ground and tell sad stories,'" he quoted banteringly. "Ah, Caroline, we mustn't fight shadows."

XXIV

THE Tillinghursts occupied a small house in the rue de Grenelle. It was a charming house—indeed, Violet was not to be conceived of in other than charming surroundings. The exterior, of gray stone, was severe and of a good simplicity, and was as completely non-committal as most Parisian houses are, but, inside, Violet was intensely manifest. The furnishings, bought when there was plenty of money, were selected with discrimination and disposed with a sure taste. Comfort, and a certain spirited elegance, that was so much a part of her individuality, were all-pervasive.

Tonight, the pretty drawing-rooms stood silent and expectantly empty. They were bright with the steady glow of many shaded lamps, and perfumed with the freshness of almost odorless white iris, and the keener sweetness of mimosa and freesia. The French windows on the garden side of the house were open, and the soft night breeze caught the heavy curtains and bellied them into the semblance of Venetian sails, pale saffron-colored, and stole between them into the room to ruffle the foliage of the flowers, and sport with silken fringes.

There was an air of waiting emptiness about the place, like a set stage when the curtain slides up and reveals only chairs and tables—calculated participants in the drama.

When Violet appeared, they lost their significance,

Cousin Julia

somehow, became merely a negligible background for the human players. She had not changed. All her dignity of bearing, with its dash of devilment, and her peculiar, slender grace, were still her own, and upon this occasion Worth had had the enhancement of her charms.

"Violet is one of those women," her friend Madame de Berri had once said, "who has enough distinction to risk Worth. He's so elegant that he's almost dowdy, a royal dowdiness, of course, but difficult. He either makes you look a *grande dame* or a fright."

He did not make Violet look a fright. She was wearing, tonight, all white, with a very ticklish handling of some old lace. Old lace has so often proved the ruin of a smart gown, but Violet wore it *en reine*, and her jewels were a string of small and exceedingly good pearls. When she came in, she looked about the room carefully to see that everything was in order, and then, crossing to the table where the bowl of freesia stood, bent over the flowers. Their bewitching fragrance half intoxicated her and she breathed it deeply, with delicately distended nostrils. Then, taking a letter from the front of her gown, she held it forward under the lamp where the light would fall on it, and read it again and again. The contents, it was evident, pleased her, and her eyes narrowed, and gleamed with satisfaction, like those of a cat whom you flatter with your caress. It was not long, two sides only of four pages, and when she had read it for the last time, she straightened up and tore the paper into little bits, careful that each piece should be very small. With these in her hand she swept into the dining room.

Presently the little ormolu clock on the mantelpiece—a present from Félix—struck eight, and Violet, sum-

Cousin Julia

moning a servant, requested him to tell Mr. Tillinghurst that the guests would soon arrive.

"I'm all ready," Bob himself replied from the staircase. "You never suppose anyone is on time but yourself."

"You'll feel so much less disagreeable when you've had your dinner," she remarked. "The dinner is very good tonight."

"I'm not disagreeable. How do I look?" He went to a mirror, and standing before it, ran his finger round the inside of his collar.

Bob, too, had not changed—or at least but very little. He was still good-looking, all but his mouth, and his figure was still hard and well set up. But his mouth had fallen into deeper lines of selfishness than before, with a touch of weariness—of unprofitable ennui.

"A weak bad mouth," Violet often thought when she looked at him, "and very eloquent. Poor Bob, it's not quite fair! So few of us are cursed with such revealing features."

Meanwhile she had followed him into the drawing-room.

"I wish I had a drink," he observed. "I wish to goodness we had cocktails before dinner!"

"Barbarous custom," she murmured.

"That's all right, but a cold, yellow cocktail, the way you get them in America, is a very encouraging thing to get hold of before a damn dinner party." He lit a cigarette.

"There's a new lot of that good sherry."

"That's good. Who's coming to this party, anyway?"

"Well, the Lormes, of course, and——"

Cousin Julia

"Of course. We don't seem to be able to give a party without them."

"Oh, no, hardly that. I said of course because, as you remember, the dinner is really for them."

"To say good-by—oh, yes. From the Faubourg to the frontier," he chuckled. "I wonder what they want. I don't see how they have the heart to bleed the old man any harder, and what's more, I don't see how he stands it as it is."

Violet was silent.

"As for us, it doesn't seem likely that Cousin Julia will see any necessity for keeping all this up much longer——" he nodded significantly at their surroundings. "Louise is launched."

She reddened. For an instant the scented luxury of the room, the man opposite her, the whole situation, presented itself to her with a rather unpleasant vividness. Of course they, and the Lormes as well, were parasites, battenning on that sturdy, silent old man in America, but it was unnecessary to air the fact with such crude casualness. Violet's morality consisted in doing, as someone once said, "the things one ought not to do, in the way they ought to be done."

She had been brought up in a family of which it might be said this was the golden rule. Her father, a courtly and charming spendthrift, had inadvertently made way with the money of many widows and orphans—his own had gone with it, to be sure—but the attitude of the family, who understood the situation perfectly, toward him was that of trusting subjects toward a benevolent and high-minded patriarch. Violet's sister married a rich and odious little person whom she loathed, and yet in their most intimate moments her nearest and dearest maintained with each

Cousin Julia

other the legend that she adored him. Her two brothers, as engaging young reprobates as ever lived, after devastating absences only to be explained by the subsequent champagne bills which their father did not pay (if he could help it), were never openly admitted, during the period of recuperation which followed, to be suffering from anything but severe colds. The family knew, perfectly well, that they had been drunk, but the decencies were entirely upheld, according to the Tillinghurst code, by not admitting it.

So Violet, who realized quite clearly that ladies and gentlemen do petty and cruel and dishonest, and often low and vulgar, things, also believed that ladies and gentlemen never, under any circumstances, admit it to themselves, or refer to it to anyone else. Bob's cynical frankness in this respect always annoyed and disgusted her, and tonight she found him particularly unbearable. She frowned.

"What's the matter?" he remarked.

"Nothing. I suppose you've heard that one of the Collingsworths is courting Virginia?"

"You don't say so! Which one?"

"The T. B. Collingsworth's only son, Tom."

"Great Scott! That's a piece of luck! Do you think she'll land him?"

"She doesn't seem to want to."

"Want to—hell! I'd like to see any girl in her senses refuse him."

"Her mother is very much afraid that's just what she's going to do."

"Well, I'm not. It's as good as done, if it rests with her, you can bet. That will certainly put the Bradford fortune on a gold basis! And we're all right now, too; we'll be kept on."

Cousin Julia

Violet threw him a glance of unusual distaste. He was really too common. She made no answer.

"Mrs. Tom Collingsworth will want to come over here and spend her millions, and you may be sure Cousin Julia will want you to see that she spends them on the right people."

Again Violet did not answer, and then a carriage was heard entering the porte-cochère.

"That's old St. Mars, of course," Bob grumbled, getting up to throw away his cigarette. "He's been the first boy at the party now, for about seventy years. Well, you'll have to talk to him."

"I will. His new wife is ravishing, I think."

"Yes, with the temperature at forty below. I get snow blind when I talk to her."

It was a small dinner of twelve, and probably the last of the season for the Tillinghursts. The middle of June was at hand, and they were preparing for their summer flight—a round of country visits, with intervals at the seashore. The Tillinghursts, Louise and the Comtesse de Berri were the only Americans present. Madame de Berri came with her husband. He was of the cold, blue-eyed type of Frenchmen who remain always inscrutable. They were accompanied by Félix's cousin, Jean de la Chenage, a dark, debonair person, not unlike Lorme himself in appearance. Both Félix and Jean were connections of the old Count St. Mars de la Chenage. Among the other guests were the Russian military attaché, and the Austrian minister and his pretty, young wife. Violet invited the pretty Austrian a great deal just now, as nothing kept Bob in so good a humor as to have her next him at dinner. Her vivacity, and extremely naughty tongue, had laced him to her chariot for the time being, and

Cousin Julia

tonight, for reasons of her own, Violet wished her husband to be amused.

The dinner was, as Violet had predicted, very good, and went off well. The little Austrian lady shouted her wickednesses down the table to the Russian attaché at the other end, whose wife was in Petersburg, and Bob drank a great deal of champagne, and made love to her in the intervals. Louise was, as usual, secretly shocked by much that was said, but would not have let it be known for worlds. She looked very lovely, dressed in softest pink, with a few diamonds here and there—a pink and white moss rose, spangled with dew.

“Why, in Heaven’s name, my dear Lorme, are you dragging this lovely creature off to—to this extraordinary place, wherever it is, in America? It’s unbelievable!” cried St. Mars de la Chenage, who was seated next to Louise.

He was a much liked and rather dreadful old person, and had recently married for the third time. The last wife was a young and beautiful girl, who had wanted, not his fine name—she had one of her own—but his equally fine fortune, which she and her family did not have, and of which they were bitterly in need.

“I’m not dragging my wife away, dear Cousin,” returned Félix. “It’s my wife who’s dragging me—most reluctantly, too, I assure you,” he added, looking at Violet.

“Who cares what becomes of you?” responded the old fellow spiritedly. “The sooner you’re dragged off the better. I wish you were in Yokohama! But this dear child! We want her in the country; my wife and I want her with us in the country—do we not, Yolande? She must come and walk in the sunlight—

Cousin Julia

women with golden hair should always walk in the sunlight—and feed my white peacocks.”

There was general laughter at this, in which the old man himself joined. He loved the center of the stage.

“And to think of leaving Paris in June!” he pursued.

“But no one is in Paris in July, my friend,” put in Violet.

“To think of not being in Paris in July!” he repeated.

“You’re not in Paris in July yourself,” she reminded him.

“Will no one leave me in peace with this lovely exile,” he cried, “to talk to her of my white peacocks?”

“*Mon Dieu!*” exclaimed the pretty Austrian, “St. Mars has been reading *Salome!* But don’t talk to her about peacocks, for the love of heaven! They do very well for poetry, but not for women. She won’t come for peacocks!” she giggled mischievously. “Try her with pearls, *cher,*” she glanced at Violet’s; “white pearls, instead, and you’ll see!”

Her husband left his aspic of *foie gras* long enough to remark, with his mouth full of it:

“*Tu es scandaleuse,* Titine!” He shook his head at her rebukingly, and then hastened to refill his plate before the flunky got by.

Louise was pleased enough at receiving so much attention, but the conversation bored her. It struck her as being more than usually pointless, and St. Mars as being insane.

“By the way, Louise,” Bob suddenly remarked, “I hear your lovely sister is in a fair way of getting married.”

“Upon my word!” exclaimed the irrepressible Count.

Cousin Julia

"Another one! Is there another one, a lovely sister, too?"

"Rather," said Jean, disengaging himself from his murmured conversation with his neighbor, Madame de Berri. "We all met her two years ago. Enchanting person! I loved her to distraction!"

"And to no purpose," put in the Russian, who had also known Virginia.

"Quite true, she wouldn't look at me," Jean admitted.

"Of course not, who would?" exclaimed St. Mars. "But how is it possible that I——" he turned reproachfully to Louise. "Ah, Madame, a lovely replica of yourself, and unmarried—and you didn't present me!"

"You were in the country, I believe."

"With his peacocks," giggled the little Austrian, "with his white peacocks."

St. Mars glared at her. She was not his type at all; he preferred stupid women if they were pretty, and he had always disliked her.

"And now she is to marry another!" he went on sadly, smelling his wine, and then tasting it sparingly.

"That," whispered the Austrian lady to Bob, "is what he's been doing all his life. He marries another every few days. Do you wonder they all die?"

"A lucky man, whoever he is," rumbled the Russian officer, in his heavy voice. "She is the kind of woman one doesn't forget. Even I——" he let his eyeglass drop from his eye—"even I have not forgotten her."

"Yes, Bob, it's true," Louise said, when she finally found an opportunity to reply; "Virginia is engaged. Mother cabled us today."

Bob threw Violet a triumphant glance. "Catch any

Cousin Julia

girl refusing *that*," he repeated to himself. Violet, however, did not observe the I-told-you-so look. She was engaged with Félix, who was talking of something else.

One or two of the guests left when the conventional interval after dinner had elapsed, but most of them stayed on for baccarat. Louise was anxious to go early. She was tired, and had, moreover, been told that nothing made wrinkles like sitting up late. Besides, she hated cards. The Austrian minister sat near her on the sofa, discussing entrées, and at the farther end of the room, Violet stood by an open window with Félix. The curtains had been drawn apart, and a glimpse of black, starlit sky, and the vague, dark forms of trees were dimly visible from within. Violet looked out into the shadows, and Lorme looked at her. They talked together softly and in fragments.

"Félix," Louise suddenly called across to her husband, "everyone has gone in to play cards. I think I'll go home now."

"Whenever you say," he replied.

"My dear child, so early!" Violet protested.

"It's been simply lovely," Louise returned. "Your parties always are, but I'm awfully tired."

"So sorry! You'll send Félix back for baccarat?"

"Félix will come back," said Louise simply.

When they had gone, the Austrian, who felt that a safe digestive period had elapsed, went into the card room. Violet refused to accompany him.

"I'm not going to play cards tonight," she said, "but do go yourself, and leave me here by the window."

There was a glow of color in her cheeks and a dash of excitement in her eyes. When she was alone, she

Cousin Julia

picked up a light shawl, and stepped through the French window out into the still garden. The little iron gate in the farther end of the stone wall surrounding the garden was ajar, and everything was very quiet. The breeze had vanished, and no longer stirred the pulses of the night with its troubling caress.

Occasionally, the crisp progress of a pedestrian over the stone sidewalk cut the silence with its crescendo of rhythmic sound, ringing out sharply as it passed the half-open gate, and receding, but not softening in sound, until it lost itself in the distance. The footsteps resounded with a kind of furtive triumph. She fancied them all bent on delicately wicked and beguiling intrigues. She was Parisian enough to feel that intrigue was the wine of love, and that tonight, as during all its vivid lifetime, Paris was inciting it, and thrilling to it, and it charged the mysterious beauty of the slumberous June night with a piquant exaltation.

The shadows in the garden were thick and inky, and the great chestnut tree above, in the full glory of its blooming, dropped its heavy perfume about her. She was as white in the starlight as its sleeping flowers, and as still—waiting.

MRS. BRADFORD did not wait for the arrival of the Lormes to announce Virginia's engagement to the world. She had no desire to encourage any inconclusiveness in that arrangement, and a few days after the foregoing events the vanquished mothers of Columbia learned that Julia Watts' daughter had carried off the prize. Accompanying this announcement, which headed in very large print the column of personal information so dear to the Sunday breakfast tables of the community, was another to the effect that Louise, Marquise de Lorme, younger daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Bradford, would arrive the following month with her husband for an indefinite visit, and it added that her little son had been left at the Château of Rochefort, in the care of the dowager Marquise de Lorme.

Perhaps these paragraphs marked for Mrs. Bradford as complete a success as ambition often achieves, and it would be interesting to know to what degree she enjoyed it. Did she lie back, metaphorically—her physical back never relaxed—and savor this accomplishment as an artist tastes applause, her heart warm with happiness, her imagination thrilling with achievement? Or did it depress her with a sense of occupation gone? Did she feel that she had indeed builded well, but that now, with no other brick to lay, the dust of idleness would parch her throat? More likely it was merely a milestone to her, and, as is the

Cousin Julia

way of ambition, she had already passed it, scarcely heeding. There was still the marriage to be consummated, and then, doubtless, her cold gaze searched the mists of a more distant future. Another generation would be coming on, and there might be work for Julia Bradford, still.

It was the day of Mrs. Bradford's reception for her two daughters. Louise and her husband had arrived only the night before, and as they had been expected a week earlier, the delay had been somewhat disturbing to Mrs. Bradford. She liked things done methodically, to live on a schedule like a railway train would have been entirely satisfactory to her, but as she never bothered anyone about nonessentials—wisely reserving all her power for the crises—she paid no attention to their late arrival.

Louise, who was looking very pretty, and was extraordinarily well dressed, seemed delighted to be at home. She found the house charming, and shed a few tears when she kissed her father, whom she had seen but once during the six years that had passed since she left America. She had, of course, been highly pleased at Virginia's engagement, and congratulated and gracefully patronized her sister, and she and her mother talked the affair over thoroughly in the long hour they spent together before Louise went to bed.

Two servants, and a formidable amount of luggage accompanied the Lormes, and the installation had to be hastily accomplished, so that the attention of the entire household could be focused on the impending festivity.

It had not occurred to Louise, during the years she had spent abroad, that she was homesick, but from the

Cousin Julia

unexpected pleasure she took in being home again it would seem that she had been. Although this house was new to her, and vastly different from the ones she had lived in as a girl, the old home atmosphere pervaded it. The coffee and hot bread at breakfast had the same well-remembered flavor, there was still a canary in the sewing room, the same neat, Swedish maids did their work with the same cold efficiency—Mrs. Bradford's relations with her servants were more business-like, and, though scrupulously just, more entirely impersonal than are most women's, for which reason she employed Swedes rather than Irish. Louise found her mother, too, wonderfully unchanged, with the same mannerisms and habits of moving about the house she remembered as a child, and which gave the final touch of familiarity to her home-coming.

And it was restful and pleasant to be, again, Louise Bradford, the darling of the household, her mother's favorite. A sense of liberty penetrated her. Here, away from Violet Tillinghurst's constant tutelage, she could do anything her fancy might dictate. She could pound nails in the walls, and hang the pictures she liked, move the furniture, wear more jewelry and bigger hats, in a word, escape for a time from the tyranny of living up to a fixed and alien standard. Although perhaps she did not realize it, some of her carefully constructed Marquise de Lorme make-up was already dissolving, and Louise Bradford was again resuming her own. In spite of the excitement and novelty of her life abroad, it had, in reality, all been an unceasing and wearying effort. Louise's adaptability was imitative, not really assimilative. She could, with constant vigilance and care, assume a part, but she could not become it. She could trim and cramp and compress

Cousin Julia

herself to fit into a given mold, but she could not fill it like a fluid. There was, indeed, little fluidity in her own or her mother's temperament.

Today's activities were the longest step of all back into a past she had scarcely realized she had loved and missed. Ever since they could remember, the day of a party had been one of horror to the girls. And even now, with all her servants and her experience, Mrs. Bradford liked to keep it so. For some obscure, psychological reason—perhaps it was the memory of a once necessary habit—a sparing and unpalatable luncheon was always ordered on these occasions, and the family ate its chipped beef or hash from one end only of the dining-room table. The entire discipline of the house was relaxed, and Mrs. Bradford seemed to revel in the universal disturbance and discomfort that obtained. When she had large parties she liked them to be, unmistakably, affairs, with obtrusive decorations, mobs of people and elaborate food. She very capably saw to all the preparations herself, and found it a most congenial activity.

On the day of this, the most auspicious of all her entertainments, she moved about with her usual calm energy, seeing that attic windows were washed, and silver cleaned, and that everything that could be thought of to do, relevant or irrelevant to the evening's affair, was done. The early afternoon she spent in the drawing-room, supervising the disposition of plants and flowers, and intermittently cataloguing the cards from countless pink florists' boxes addressed to the girls, which poured in constantly.

"Mrs. Winfield Watson, orchids," she would murmur, writing it down on a long slip of paper, and giving, meantime, an eye to the placing of a potted

Cousin Julia

palm in the hall. She was extremely punctilious, and desired that every flower be properly recorded and subsequently acknowledged. Servants, she felt, were not to be trusted to take care of the cards, and of course it occurred to no one, least of all to them, that the girls do it themselves. This was the type of American household where the children are always waited upon as a matter of course, by everybody, from the least of the servants to the parents, and where it is only demanded of them that they deign to accept.

As usual, the house wore its disheveled and discordant air. Everywhere the odor of soapsuds mingled with that of roses; there was a stepladder in the Adams reception room, and a hammer and ball of twine on the drawing-room table singularly disturbed the harmony of that apartment. All the doors and windows were open, maids were everywhere, strange negroes laid out hired spoons in the pantry, and a spirit of hollow bustle prevailed generally. Only upstairs in Louise's closed rooms, and down on the shaded terrace, where Félix and Virginia had taken refuge, was there peace.

XXVI

THEY had been silent for some time, and as he stood before her in the clear, afternoon light, idly leaning against the stone balustrade, it occurred to her that his face was even more interesting than she had remembered it. She wondered if Louise were more, or less, in love with him than at first. More, she would have said, had it been any other woman than Louise, but she questioned whether her sister possessed the warmth of temperament and the imagination necessary to sustain a passion, although Virginia, with her youth and inexperience, had scarcely guessed how much more fire and more depth it takes to endow one person with the capacity to enchant one continuously, than to respond to the passing excitement of new and unexplored enthusiasms.

People are so fond of considering themselves rarely gifted, temperamental or what not, when they are unable to love deeply for very long, and react only to the lure of novelty. Instead of which, there is nothing more usual. Most trashy people are, secretly or openly, like that—and there are so many trashy people! It is very easy and very cheap to be too temperamental to be faithful, and the frequency of apparently successful marriages does not mean that they are all glorified by a vital and increasing passion, but, often, that they are merely protected by love of decorum, fear of scandal, or lack of opportunity and temptation. Sometimes one, sometimes another. To love one

Cousin Julia

person intensely, ecstatically, faithfully, through a lifetime of level domesticity, is the achievement—if it ever is achieved—of fine souls, endowed with real warmth, real romance, real temperament.

Virginia realized that she did not profoundly know her sister, and never had. She had remained a semi-stranger. But such as Louise seemed to her, it was curiously difficult for Virginia to conceive of her as the wife of this man, or of him as her husband. He was a vivid person, clear-cut, full of color and of contrasts. His mouth was too red against the clear pallor of his skin. His eyebrows were strongly drawn and drooped superciliously, his nose was high and finely modeled, and his eyes captivated and held her. They were dark and brilliant, of a deep hazel flecked with green, understanding, humorous, a trifle weary, and something else she could not explain. They had looked, she felt, upon a great variety of things.

He seemed an entirely new personality to her. In this new environment, and this, if not new, at least newly circumstanced relationship, which was now thrust upon her in its full intimacy for the first time since it existed, he quite detached himself from her previous images of him. He was a member of the same family, living under the same roof, and still a stranger, exotic, but rich in flexible sympathies. This last she felt, without knowing in the least why. She thought him handsome, and mysteriously expressive. A long-forgotten remark of Violet Tillinghurst's about the Latin type came to her mind.

He turned just then, and seated himself on the low stone railing, observing her.

"What are you thinking about?" he remarked.

Virginia was pleased. No one ever asked her what

Cousin Julia

she was thinking about, or at least not with any real desire to know, and she often wished they would. To be sure, Davie had occasionally done so, but, as he had an unshakeable belief that none but aurora-tinted fancies soaring starwards ever occupied her mind, he did not listen to her answer. At present she suspected a genuine curiosity as to her mental processes, and, as has been said, it pleased her.

"I was thinking just at that moment of Violet Tillinghurst."

"Nothing more interesting than that?"

"I thought you liked her."

"I adore her, but people aren't so interesting to think about as things, are they?"

Virginia's level, shadowy gaze went past him and rested on the remote line of silver that was the lake. She answered reflectively:

"No, they're not. I don't think that it ever occurred to me before, in so many words, but it's true."

There was a pause.

"I wasn't really thinking of *her*, though," she resumed; "I was thinking of something she once said about the Latin type."

He laughed.

"That sounds like her. What did she say?"

"I don't remember, only that she said you had it."

"I?" He shrugged. "But so have you, if I may so flatter such a variable thing."

"Do you think so?" she said, charmed.

Her eyes returned to him and she smiled. She was sitting in a deep, wicker chair, with a scarlet cushion thrust back of her dark head. Her arms and throat were bare and lightly tanned, and through the thin lace of her bodice the skin of her bosom showed, faintly

Cousin Julia

whiter than the rest. She stirred, suddenly conscious of her appearance.

"You do not look Anglo-Saxon, certainly," he was saying, "and I wondered if otherwise—mentally"—he smiled at her a little quizzically—"you are?"

"How interesting of you to wonder what I or anyone else is like mentally. We don't," she said, smiling again, while one eyebrow lifted above the other, "do that much in Columbia."

"Don't you?" he said, laughing. He came down from the railing, and, dragging a chair near her, sat down, and lighted one of his infrequent cigarettes. "Perhaps you're all too busy building cities over night, and doing all sorts of useful, extraordinary things. I remember feeling something very interesting about this Northwest of yours when I was here before; I don't just recall what it was."

Virginia was too much a part of it to feel, in the newness and bigness of this Northwest of hers, as he called it, the imaginative appeal.

"But we were saying——" she reminded him, eager to return to what had interested her.

"Oh, about people—the microscopic attitude, to quote Violet again. I daresay it's the result of idleness; one must think about something. In one way people don't interest me at all. Who they are, and what they *do*, isn't usually important, and personally they are almost always tedious, but in the abstract, as a queer combination of brains and desires, they do. I have a lot of curiosity," he laughed, "as to what goes on inside their heads—*some* of their heads."

"Then," she replied, with a little smile that tilted the high eyebrow characteristically, "you were just putting me on the slide like a new kind of beetle!"

Cousin Julia

“Exactly.”

They both laughed.

“Sometimes, you know,” he said, “you hope to uncover that confounded spark inside that is personality.”

“The thing,” she exclaimed, leaning forward, “that makes you, you, and me, me.”

She looked at him, and their eyes met with a little thrill of understanding. For a moment she lost track of what they were saying. Her gaze left his, and rested on a cascade of twinkling poplar leaves glistening in the sunlight. She felt suddenly near to the life of the world, and strangely a part of it.

He shared her silence companionably, his cigarette burning itself away between his fingers. His hands were very white. She reopened their talk presently at the point where they had left off, and it drifted on into the mysteries of personality. Virginia became wholly interested in the subject, and grateful for this rare occasion of expressing herself to a person both interested and helpful. At the same time there was an undercurrent of purely personal comment in her mind, her companion being the object of this subconscious scrutiny.

She found him full of a courteous aloofness, and yet he seemed curiously near to her. He possessed, she thought, a certain sureness and lightness of touch, a finish that stimulated and put her at her ease, and a trace of careless pride that made a fastidious appeal to her own. He was, she felt, so much a part of a very different world from Columbia. Then, when the conversation stumbled, by and by, on its own intricacies, they again became silent.

He got up and turned toward the vacant sky and distant hills, with an impression of troubling eyes and

Cousin Julia

the clean curve of a bare, tanned throat, strong in his consciousness. Her beauty made her naïve interest in the elementary metaphysics they had touched upon very attractive to him. It might be added that Lorme seldom interested himself in the mental activities of persons who were not outwardly more than usually pleasing.

As for Virginia, she followed in her mind the thoughts their words had evoked, getting fragmentary realizations she could not have expressed, till, suddenly, her undisciplined faculty lost its hold on these abstractions, and she became conscious again of her surroundings, of the sound of her mother's monotonous commands.

"Where is Louise?" she inquired irrelevantly.

"She is preparing for tonight," he replied with a humorous shrug.

"Not already?"

"Oh, yes. She's probably sleeping just now. She believes that all beauties take a nap in the afternoon to make their eyes bright, and what your sister believes—well—she believes!"

"Yes, doesn't she?" murmured Virginia impulsively.

Félix did not hear her. He stood looking down at Virginia, his hands thrust into the pockets of his white flannel jacket.

"Louise," he went on, "has the 'patience of the toilet,' as we say. That's why she looks, in the evening, like a young pear tree in full bloom."

"She's *so* pretty," exclaimed the girl, with wistful enthusiasm.

Lorme noticed her expression, and was surprised.

"Surely *you* do not envy her her looks!" he said incredulously.

XXVII

AFTER their betrothal, Collingsworth overwhelmed Virginia with extravagant presents, moved by a naïve, if unconscious, conviction that he was thereby proving the extent of his affection, and perhaps strengthening hers. He had a very definite sense of the real value of money—whether the sum were large or small—a sense which his own great wealth had never in the least blunted, and a profound belief in its importance and efficacy. She enjoyed the gifts as much as was possible for a person whose hunger for trinkets had never been whetted by deprivation, and who had, moreover, little lust for possessions. The fact that these new gewgaws were more magnificent than those she was accustomed to receive caused her, at the time, a certain pleasure, but she soon lost interest in them.

Mrs. Bradford and Louise, however, took a very solid satisfaction in the jeweled bracelets and combs, in the brooches and gold-fitted workbaskets, and all the other expensive, pretty, useless expressions of the young lover's devotion. And they never tired talking about the pearl necklace it was rumored Virginia was to have as a wedding present from the Collingsworths. Louise had never had a pearl necklace—a necklace, that is, of any size, and desired one acutely. But notwithstanding that, she still felt that she had the best of it. A title was better even than pearls, and besides, with these new riches coming into the family, her

Cousin Julia

mother would doubtless soon see to it that she had both.

Tom was obliged to spend most of the summer away from Columbia. Business transactions of importance were in progress which took him to various parts of the country. When he was in town, he and Virginia spent most of their time motoring to clubs, and to the country places of their many friends. And there were intervals of eager love-making, when he told her how pretty, fascinating, and infinitely desirable she was, and kissed her hands, and eyes, and bare throat and lips. Virginia spent some time considering those kisses. She wondered how she could endure them—respond to them as she often did, when her spirit was so far from present. She dreaded them and repented of them, and yet she gave them, and that she could give them, and then be sorry that she had, made her feel she had done something vaguely wrong. As the summer advanced, she saw him less and less frequently. It was expected that his travels would be over by August, and that arrangements would then be made for the wedding. In the meantime, she was glad of the rarity of his visits.

The Lormes' stay prolonged itself. Louise found herself increasingly happy in her surroundings. Freed from the constraint of her life in Paris, she realized more and more how much of a burden it had been, gladly assumed, but nevertheless a burden. There she had considered it a triumph to be admitted at all to the little set of fashionables among whom she, overshadowed by Violet Tillinghurst's dash and magnetism, maintained a modest footing. Here, she was lionized. All of her old popularity, founded on her beauty and the fact that innately she was, like a certain kind of

Cousin Julia

plays, just what the public wants, remained, and added to it was the glamour of her new position, which a carefully manipulated pose of gentle condescension kept always in evidence.

She never tired of telling admiring women stories of smart life in Paris, or of purring agreeable platitudes in her flattering way to the men, who found her soft, pink beauty and absence of contrary opinions delightfully feminine. She became, in fact, the rage, and went happily from luncheon to tea, from dinner to dance, receiving the homage she knew to be her due. Lorme seldom accompanied her. He no longer danced, and most of the dinner parties bored him. Instead he read a great deal, played bridge at the club for as high stakes as he could find, and rode horseback with Virginia. To her, his companionship was an unprecedented experience. His purely Latin gayety and joy in living, his enthusiasms and disdains, his intellectuality which had too broad a basis of culture to be pedantic, presented to her an unfamiliar type, one which, years before, she had been too young to fully apperceive or understand.

Virginia was brought up in a household in which, as in the majority of households in Columbia, books played no real part. Columbia had been, a generation or two before, a frontier town, and pioneers travel light—at least as regards literature. Prairie schooners and lake boats were not loaded with books in the forties and fifties, and a love of them was accidental rather than traditional among the sons and grandsons of these pioneers, absorbed, like their parents, in the activities of a growing civilization. Now, of course, the best houses all contained books, often in large quantities, but they stood for the most part, unmellowed by

Cousin Julia

love or use, in unapproachable bookcases, bearing entirely the same relation to the family life as the wall paper and Turkish rugs.

Current novels, never of course to be found wedged in among these tightly fitted sets of distinguished authors which helped upholster the drawing-room, fed all the imaginative and mental hunger, not satisfied by newspapers and periodicals, of the greater number of people Virginia knew, people to whom all that is important in literature remained practically unrevealed. The classics they occasionally read about, but never actually read. They were regarded as having a great deal to do with one's early education, like blackboards and Latin grammars, but the fragments of Milton and Cervantes, Dante and Shakespeare, that were obtruded upon the youthful period of study were seldom read, even then, and never afterward.

This willingness to deprive oneself of the beauty and wisdom of the supreme moments of the intellectual life of the world is so much the rule that it never occasions surprise. Strangely enough, complete ignorance of the masters is usually accompanied in Columbia, as elsewhere, by a curious conviction that one knows them very well—a conviction born, doubtless, of their eternal presence on the book shelves. Almost every educated person one meets feels that he knows intimately the Homer or Goethe, the Carlyle or Molière, that is in reality only a name to him, so familiar as to have become a household word.

An absence of real intellectuality, then, and an uncomprehending attitude toward its value and pleasures prevailed among the people Virginia frequented, as indeed it so largely does in American life generally, and it was an attitude which she, of course, to a large ex-

Cousin Julia

tent, shared. But she shared it by accident of environment, not by temperament, which explains, perhaps, the avidity with which she fell upon the companionship of the gifted and keenly thoughtful Frenchman.

XXVIII

VIRGINIA and Félix, as often happened, were lunching alone. A cold, slanting rain had fallen all day, but, safely housed from it in the limousine motor which had finally supplanted the family carriage, Louise and her mother had happily rolled away to a party. Their appearance, Virginia felt, as she observed them from the window, grandly seated behind the dripping glass that surrounded them, was undoubtedly impressive.

Mrs. Bradford never ventured further into the region of colors than gray, or an occasional discreet purple, but today, owing to the weather, she had fallen back on her favorite black. In this case, it was *crêpe de Chine*, heavily embossed in braided fantasies and silk-wrought flowers, and it fitted remorselessly. Her eyeglasses hung from a smart white ribbon edged with black and furnished with a sliding clasp of tiny black pearls, brought to her from Paris by Louise. Her hat was a marvel of uncompromising correctness, close-fitting, equipped with black wings, and smartened by a touch of white. Louise was in dark blue—a bit of sartorial perfection from Paquin, guiltless of trimming, and slyly designed to emphasize her nice, plump arms, curving bosom, and slender waist, under its Quakerish simplicity.

“Of all the self-satisfied partridges, perched up there!” Virginia said to herself with twinkling eyes, as she watched them. She was struck, too, for the first

Cousin Julia

time, by a distinct resemblance between Mrs. Bradford and her daughter. The car slid from under the portecochère out into the rain, and Virginia, still leaning against the pane, beat a tattoo on it with her slender fingers, and hummed loudly to herself.

She thanked heaven that she was not with them. They were going to a luncheon—one of the endless, midday festivities in which Columbia specialized, where quantities of food, recognizable as party fare by its proneness to whipped cream and chopped nuts, would be elaborately presented to from ten to twenty of the nice, intelligent, and pleasantly practical ladies of Columbia society.

Virginia, herself, was looking radiant. Because of the darkness outside she had felt inclined toward color, and had chosen a gown of deep, bright rose, that swathed her throat and came down in long, pointed sleeves to her knuckles. A sense of extraordinary well-being possessed her. The big house, after Louise and her mother had rustled and bustled away, became suddenly very homelike and cozy. The day was cool enough for fires, and they blazed and crackled in every fireplace, dispensers, as always, of good cheer. The rooms were quiet and friendly, and presently Félix would come down and join her for lunch. She left the window and went to a mirror to smooth back her black, cloudy hair, which she wore parted on one side, and drawn from her face into a Psyche knot at the back of her head.

It was a willful, colorful face that looked back at her, trembling to every shade of emotion. She was as physically expressive as a sensitive animal. Then she left the mirror, and taking a few waltz turns across the room, dropped into a big chair before the fire and

Cousin Julia

folded her hands. The flames leaped and danced again in the dark gray of her eyes. Outside, the rain fell in a thick and continuous downpour. Occasionally a gust of wind caught it and slapped it against the windowpane, where it made a great splash and trickled down in a hundred rivulets. The ceaseless movement and muffled sound of its falling, the warmth of the fire, and the untroubled peace of the day hypnotized Virginia. Her brain was as empty as a sea over which, occasionally, snatches of unrelated thought, like errant gulls, fitted vaguely.

When Félix came down he crossed the wide hall unperceived, the sound of his footsteps lost in the thick pile of the carpet. He was about to enter, when he caught sight of Virginia, and paused in the doorway to look at her. She was like a bright flower dropped on the gold of the broad, damask chair. In one hand he held a book, and his finger was thrust between the pages, keeping the place. Then he spoke:

"I hope I'm not late." She started, and looked up at him a little dazedly—she had not known he was there. "They told me about lunch a while back, but I wanted to finish a page and I'm afraid I finished several."

"What difference does it make?" she said gayly. "One time is like another. I'd forgotten lunch. It's such an adorable day I don't care whether we have one or not."

"I suppose not. You're so like some wild thing of the woods," he said, watching her rise, "that one never expects you to feed on anything but young ferns and dew."

"Instead of mutton chops and ham soufflé? No, thanks! I love to eat—nice messy things that give

Cousin Julia

you indigestion?" She laughed in silvery derision, but the flush that the blazing fire had painted on her cheeks deepened.

As he followed her into the dining room, he was again struck by the peculiarly distinctive and personal quality of her carriage and movements. "She looks as if she were carried on a breeze," he said to himself.

"You have a ripping walk, Virginia," he commented.

"Why, Félix, how appreciative you've become all of a sudden! You never flattered me before."

"I never flatter anyone."

She took her place at the table and he stood by her, still holding the book.

"I don't know what to do with it," he complained.

"I haven't anything to mark the place."

"Here, you helpless young person," she said, laughing, and handed him her handkerchief.

"Thanks, I hate losing it." He sat down.

"You're reading one of the dark blue set out of the big library, aren't you?"

"Why, yes, I believe it is blue."

"Well, I'm glad someone has found something in there to read!"

"Am I the only person who ever has?"

"Yes. We never read those books."

"They're very good ones," he observed. "Who bought them?"

"They came with the house. Mother got a list from one of the designers and bought everything on it."

"How extremely characteristic," he replied, laughing.

"But what are you reading that you're so interested in?" she pursued curiously.

"Why, I came across some Descartes and Spinoza

Cousin Julia

yesterday. Spinoza——” he repeated, and then paused inconclusively, as if many things had simultaneously rushed into his mind for utterance, and he scarcely knew which to say first. Philosophy and philosophers interested him, and it did not occur to him that they would not also interest Virginia.

As a matter of fact, she was interested, and also pleased that he should talk to her about them. He talked rather brilliantly, and today he had a great deal to say. Spinoza, particularly, captured Virginia's imagination. She could not follow the abstractions of his system, but his life and personality were wonderfully arresting. And, too, it seemed strange to her in some way that she and Lorme should be sitting there alone in the quiet house talking about Spinoza—that two such irrelevant beings as themselves should be discussing him, hundreds of years after he was dead. Dukes and princes who rode in gilded chariots past the door of his poor lodgings were all gone and unutterably forgotten, and yet here was he, this obscure, despised Jew, taking a lively place at her lunch table, and in all the modern world. He, Félix said, had had his part in molding the thought of the century, his ideas still wrought, directly, or filtered through the works of hundreds of later sages. So millions of people thought a little differently, and consequently were a little different themselves, because he had lived and had been able, in an age of bigotry and repression, to rise above it, and live and think in a region of serene truth, forbidden and abhorred of priests and princes. She was stirred by the thought, and exalted. That there was nothing very new or in the least original about this idea, that it had occurred to almost everyone who thought at all, and about many great men, did

Cousin Julia

not come into her mind. It was new to her, and revealing, and she was thrilled by it.

"He was like a star," she exclaimed suddenly, "sending his light to us from so far away!"

"All great thinkers are like that," he replied. "The black sky is the past, and they are the stars whose light we live by."

"Yes," she said eagerly, "yes. There is a reason, isn't there, for being fine, for not being small and wrapped up in food and money and clothes and other people's affairs?"

"If there is a reason for anything."

His reply dampened her. What was the reason for it all, for anything—was there any?

"If there is a reason for anything," he repeated. "Perhaps there isn't. We are so used to thinking in terms of cause and effect, and perhaps it's only applying finite rules to infinite things."

The maid came in just then with a bowl of ripe strawberries. Virginia filled her plate, and covered them with thick, rich cream. Her mood changed. The simple act, and her anticipation of eating them seemed to make her herself again—thoughtless, pleasure-loving, *gourmande*. She glanced across at Félix. He looked the essence of the everyday, in his Norfolk tweeds and a smart collar.

"You know, Félix, you don't seem a bit the sort of person who'd be interested in all that kind of thing," she said to him naïvely.

"Is there a special kind of person for every subject?" he inquired with a smile.

"Oh, no, it's not that, but you read such serious things and you read so much."

"And so——"

Cousin Julia

"Well, you're simply not the kind of person I should have thought would, that's all."

"What kind of person would you expect to read serious things?"

"Why," she said, suddenly smiling, "a serious person."

"But, after all, what has seriousness got to do with intellectuality?"

"I don't know—a lot, hasn't it? At least——" she broke off, suddenly wondering why she had always thought it had.

"I see, of course, what you mean," he said, coming to the rescue. "You thought, or rather you had, without thinking about it at all, the popular idea that to care much about books you must be a bookworm—wear thick spectacles and forget to shave."

"Yes, partly that, or"—she remembered Davie—"or be very good, you know."

Lorme laughed outright.

"Be good—no, that's too funny! Why good? And besides, do you think me bad?"

"Please don't laugh. I think I meant unworldly."

He was greatly amused.

"Do you know, I should be most interested in knowing just what you mean by unworldly, and"—he paused a moment sipping his claret—"and why you consider me worldly."

"I don't think I'll tell you, if you're going to laugh at everything I say."

"You should be flattered. To be found amusing is the only excuse for talking at all."

"Aren't you ever serious?"

"You've just told me I must be since I read Spinoza."

Cousin Julia

She sighed impatiently.

"You're getting me all mixed up," she answered, rising. He pulled back her chair, and smiled into her eyes as she turned.

"So you're surprised that I love books, because you've made up your mind that I'm not unworldly. Inscrutable lady!"

"I don't know what you are," she murmured, looking at him.

His eyes darkened into gravity.

"And I don't know you," he exclaimed in a low voice. "Only that you are——" he checked himself. He was about to say, "That you are beautiful," but instead he finished his sentence another way:

"That you play more beautifully than anyone, and are going to play for me now."

But she did not play for him. Someone came to see her, and Félix went alone into the music room. He read some Brahms for a while, and then drifted into idle improvisations, playing vaguely—disconnectedly. His cigarette rolled from the tray unnoticed, and burned a little black hole in the shining surface of the piano, a mark Mrs. Bradford instantly discovered upon her return, but did not comment upon.

XXIX

VIRGINIA went out very little now. She found that her accustomed gayeties had less and less savor for her, and the fact of Collingsworth's absence made it seem natural that she should not feel inclined to frivol.

Of Tom, as a matter of fact, she thought very little; and his letters caused only the slightest ripple in her consciousness. She answered them pleasantly enough, and then forgot them. And without realizing it, she surrendered herself more and more completely to the supremely congenial companionship of her sister's husband.

It was, as has been said, a companionship that held so much that was new to her. Of course, Virginia had always aroused, if anything been surfeited by, the admiration of men, but now for the first time she had become, it seemed to her, the object of a delicate and stimulating interest. Coming, as he did, of a race whose interest in women is historic, who have always studied, understood and followed them, Lorme brought that intellectual curiosity which is a divine attribute of his nation to bear upon her individuality, and by his interest in it magnified it to a thing of great importance. She reveled in the sense of enhanced values thus created. Her talents revealed themselves to her as genius, her womanliness as a supreme gift. His humor was ready and sympathetic, his habit of introspection made him quick to understand her psycho-

Cousin Julia

logical excursions, his enthusiasms held out the torch to hers.

Between herself and the people to whom she was accustomed, Virginia had always felt a temperamental gulf to be fixed, with herself on the higher plane, and now the situation was reversed. Félix, she believed, thought more, knew more, and felt more than she did, but in delightfully the same way, so that she could hope, with striving, to follow him into fair regions of understanding and sensibility, to the secret high places of art and truth, and that thus the thralldom of life should become hers. But though in her blundering youth she was far from perceiving it, the languors and fire of his heavy-lidded eyes remained with her when the poetry he read or the music he played had slipped from her consciousness. Notwithstanding the intimacy of their friendship, Virginia's engagement was never mentioned between them. She felt that he understood the situation to a certain extent, and looked upon it as an obvious and satisfactory marriage of convenience.

XXX

IT was early in the afternoon, just after luncheon, and the entire family, with the exception of Mr. Bradford, of course, were sitting on the terrace. They had, wonderfully, all been at home, and Davie had dropped in to have lunch with them. Very few meals were taken in the Bradford house without guests. The girls had many friends, and although the violence of Virginia's intimacies had diminished during the last year or so, Louise had resumed and reinvigorated hers.

Mrs. Bradford had always encouraged the girls to bring their friends in to meals—if they were fashionable friends and she saw to it that they mostly were—and Louise had gladly taken up this habit of her girlhood. Today, however, Davie was the only guest. He was still fair and delicate-looking, touched with an air of dreaming spirituality, and still in love with Virginia.

Since her engagement a faint gloom had enshrouded him, a gloom which gave him many hours of pleasurable despair, when he could not decide whether to consign himself to the lake on some wild, high night, when it raged in the tumult of a storm, or journey to the Far East and go luridly to the devil amid the intoxications of hashish and houris. As a matter of fact, he did, of course, nothing in the least unusual, and by virtue of a gentle stubbornness with which he was endowed he even continued, in subterranean regions, to cherish a hope. She was not married yet, and in the meantime what gallant deed might he not have wrought

Cousin Julia

that would bring her to his arms? How often had he not saved the Bradford fortune through a secret of the stock exchange dexterously discovered, or rescued J. C. in his night clothes from the burning mansion in Highland Road? And as for Virginia, no star of the recent movie world—a world unknown to those unpolituted days—had experienced more thrilling escapes than Davie had plotted for her, with himself as the cool and daring, the hard-riding, hard-breathing hero. His loss was not without its compensations. He preferred, however, to display the sable of his despondency, rather than the intermittent and less interesting colors of his hope.

Mrs. Bradford liked him. His manners were nice, and the refinement of his appearance struck her as being aristocratic. And as the being who, he considered, must stand closer than any other to his goddess, his attentions to her had a fervor that was almost devotional. He had come today to see if he could entice Virginia from her retirement, and take her to the much heralded ball Mrs. Winfield Watson was giving on the eve of her departure for Europe.

Virginia, however, would not consent to go. She was not in the least in the humor for balls, or for Davie, or Mrs. Winfield Watson. Just what she *was* in the humor for she had not asked herself, but she knew she was wonderfully content. The days succeeded each other like shining waves in a swinging, sunlit sea, full, unhurried, each one complete, each one resolving itself almost imperceptibly into the next. She shrank from anything that would divert her from the peace and rhythm of this existence.

Ordinarily, Davie's presence had a perverse effect upon Virginia. He spread his devotion so palpably in

Cousin Julia

the dust at her feet that she trod upon it, childishly cruel. She was capricious, disdainful, and took upon herself the airs of a spoiled beauty. But today this reaction did not take place. He made no impression on her at all. She was rather glad to see him, and treated him with a gentle, kindly indifference. And it occurred to the young man that her beauty was excessive, that it had grown, and achieved starry depths and radiance.

In fact, it was a new and softened Virginia that seemed to have come into being. When she was out, her flashing, nervous excitability was no longer manifest. People no longer either amused or irritated her. Her attitude was benevolent and a little vague. It was as though she were preoccupied, but she would have been at a loss to say why or what it was that preoccupied her. Although she had lately taken a greater interest in dress than was habitual to her, it was a fluctuating interest and casual. She spent, however, a great deal of time at her toilet, painting and polishing her oval finger nails, and brushing her dark hair till it shone with a deep, soft luster. She did not examine her mood, or analyze it, nor ask herself the reason for this shining tranquillity, or for the heightened beauty she discovered about her, in moonshine, in music and in books. She was content to rejoice unquestioningly in the new loveliness and keener fragrance of an enhanced world.

It was very pleasant on the terrace. Louise was snuggled into the chintz cushions of a deep high-backed chair, and Virginia frankly lounged. Davie and Félix sat on the balustrade and Mrs. Bradford, wary and unyielding always as regarded the terrace which so subtly invited lolling—a thing she despised—sat bolt upright

Cousin Julia

on a small chair. A cup of coffee stood on a table beside her, but she was not drinking it. A slight frown troubled her brow, and the tip of her nose was a trifle redder than usual, as she was suffering from indigestion. Mrs. Bradford had been vaguely disturbed the last few days, and when she had things on her mind, her digestive weakness asserted itself. Her eyes were on Virginia, but she spoke to Louise.

"What do you hear about the baby, Louise?"

"Oh, he's splendid! I had a letter from Félix's mother this morning. She says he's *so* well, and she'd like to keep him in the country with her till October—for us not to think of coming home till November or December."

"Till November!" said her mother sharply. "Seems to me that's a long time to leave your boy, Louise."

"Why, Mother?" said Louise coquettishly, laughing as she spoke at the absurdity of the notion, "I believe you're anxious for us to go!"

"Nonsense!" observed Mrs. Bradford, rubbing her nose with her eyeglasses, and then tapping with them on the table top.

"I hope your mother isn't anxious for us to go," put in Félix, "because I know mine is, to have us stay away. It's spoiled her, having her grandson all to herself. She'll never want to give him up."

It was because of her mother-in-law that Louise had been obliged to come to America without the baby. Like a great many Frenchwomen, Madame de Lorme had a horror of traveling, and a fear of it. After Félix, there was nothing she adored as she had come to adore his little son. She had disliked the idea of the trip to America for any of them, but when she found Louise determined to go, she did not oppose Félix's accom-

Cousin Julia

panying her. In fact she would not have thought it proper for him not to do so. She made up her mind, however, that though they were not to be deterred from risking their lives on a transatlantic voyage, she would never consent to their risking that of her grandson. One Lorme must survive. She could not trust her all to the vicissitudes of such a journey. Boats and trains, she felt, were not the place for babies, and would very probably make him ill, even if nothing worse betided.

Louise, who was devoted to her child, hated leaving him, but the older woman's mind was made up, and with all the force of the traditional parental authority that is so operative in France she stood her ground. They might go if they must, but the child should be left with her. Of course she had her way, and the baby, an enchanting little boy of three, went to live at Rochefort, accompanied by his own trained nurse, and under the further supervision of a devoted Provençale who had nursed his father.

Having the child to herself was an ecstatic experience to Madame de Lorme. With Louise in America, it was so easy to forget his foreign inheritance, and he became entirely hers—became in a way, a dimpling, bewitching Félix again, Félix at the irresistible age of three, whom she had thought to have lost forever on the tearful day, many years before, when the old barber had come out from the village of Rochefort to the château and cut his curls. Her letters were full of the wonders the air of Provence was doing for him, of his health and general well-being, and, as Louise had said, this last communication conveyed the naïve suggestion that they wait till the heat was well over before traveling, and defer their return until October.

Cousin Julia

"And," added Louise proudly, "she says he weighs forty pounds."

There was a moment's silence on the terrace. Faintly, the crisp, sweet tones of a clock in the drawing-room came to them rapidly striking the hour.

"Three o'clock already," said Louise; "I ought to go up this minute and answer the letter." She yawned. "Oh, Félix, you write to her for me. I just must get a nap, and there won't be time afterward."

Louise hated to write letters, and did so as little as possible. Those that she finally achieved were childish affairs, rather stilted in language, and written in a small, round backhand, very neat and preferably on pale blue paper.

Mrs. Bradford turned her reflective gaze upon her younger daughter, and caught sight, as she did so, of an unusual length of curving calf emerging from beneath her white skirt into unseemly publicity. Her expression changed to a stony and significant glare. Louise looked at her mother in surprise. Mrs. Bradford's eyebrows went up, and her severe gaze went sharply down to the offending spectacle. Her daughter read the familiar signal. She blushed, and hastily uncrossed her knees, smoothing her skirt down over them. She glanced as she did so at the two men sitting opposite her on the balustrade, but Davie had engaged Lorme in a discussion of modern French poets, and they were not looking at her. Louise had the most delightful legs imaginable, but would under no circumstances have intentionally revealed them beyond the conventional limits. She was instinctively and thoroughly decorous. Her modesty, it is true, was very much inclined to follow the convention of the moment, and had set up its outposts at various lengths from the

Cousin Julia

floor, or inches below the shoulders, according to the prevailing fashions, but it was sincere. It was always the best fashions that she followed, and she kept well within the line of conventionality, though she did move the line. Mrs. Bradford's face resumed the frowning composure it had worn before this incident.

"Why on earth won't you have time?" she observed.

"*Mother*, don't you remember what a fearful number of things I have on today?" Louise complained.

Mrs. Bradford's expression relaxed. Her passion for Louise, like her passion for success, knew no bounds.

"What's so fearful about it, daughter?"

"Well, I've got to get all dressed for that tea at the Driving Club, and then come home and pick up Céleste and my things. You haven't forgotten I'm going out to the country for the week-end at Mrs. Watson's, and to stay till after the dance!"

The slight frown Mrs. Bradford had worn all day reappeared.

"What foolishness! Seems to me this is country enough without going fifteen miles further out and staying days away from home."

"For heaven's sake, *Mother!*" exclaimed Louise. "You seemed awfully pleased a week ago when I told you about it."

"It's on your father's account," said her mother coolly. "He only sees you Sundays and evenings—*some* evenings," she put in meaningly, "and after coming all this way to visit with him, I should think you'd want to be home when he's here."

"You've scolded all day long, *Mother*. What makes you so cross?" observed the spoiled child plaintively. "Somebody's got to go out or people will think we're all

Cousin Julia

dead—Virginia never will any more. She'll never go anywhere."

Again Mrs. Bradford's eyes sought Virginia. She looked at her in her intent way for a moment and then got up.

"Have the awning put up, Virgie, before the sun gets round here. You're awfully brown."

"It isn't worth while," said the girl lazily; "I won't be here long. Félix and I are going over to Liebe Frau's soon to play."

Mrs. Bradford paused, irresolutely for her, and then turned back.

"I wish you'd make some calls with me today."

"Calls—horrid calls a day like this!" cried Virginia, her eyes dreaming on the Italian sweetness of the blue sky curving down to a veiled horizon, the cool touch of a meadow-scented breeze on her smooth skin. "Mother, you're mad!" she finished with playful disrespect.

"You'd better come along, dearie," said Louise to her mother, springing from among her cushions, "and stop bothering with us. You know we always do what we like. Take a nap with me."

So the party on the veranda broke up. Louise and her mother, arm in arm, disappeared into the house. Davie made his adieux and betook himself to the desk that was provided for him in his father's office, where he spent a few hours each day cataloguing bathtubs and writing odes after the manner of François Villon—his father had the ill taste, Davie considered it, to be a very successful wholesale dealer in plumbers' supplies.

The older man had, at one time, been greatly depressed on his son's account, until he shrewdly divined that the boy had plenty of latent talent for business and very little indeed for odes, so he let him go his

Cousin Julia

way cheerfully, feeling quite sure that when he himself could no longer bear the burden of the firm, and his son was face to face with the necessity of doing so, he very capably would.

Félix, who had been sitting sideways on the balustrade, with his white-shod feet planted before him on the railing and his arms about his knees, came down, and dropped into the chair Louise had vacated. There was an interval of silence. Then Virginia said,

"I'm glad they're gone. They all talk so much. Davie was interminable about Baudelaire."

"But he's a nice sort of chap. I'm sorry for him," he added accusingly.

"Oh, that," she observed indifferently.

Félix looked at her quizzically.

"Women are extraordinary! One man offers you his soul and you toss it into the waste-paper basket, another one an hour's passion when he happens to think of it, and you kneel to receive it!"

"I have never knelt," she returned almost angrily. She wondered if he had Collingsworth in mind.

"No, you spoiled, proud young thing," he answered. "I fancy you have scarcely deigned to accept the best of affections. You know nothing of love, nothing of love."

"Oh!" she exclaimed softly, her breath catching in her throat. She felt unreasonably disturbed, startled. It seemed to her he had been cruel, had meant to be cruel and hurt her. Yet she knew this was absurd, he had said nothing, really. Love, love—how the word enticed, bewitched her! She liked the way he said it, it pleased her to hear him say it, and she wished, childishly, that he would do so again. It would be easy to

Cousin Julia

make him say it again. She would discuss love with him. But she found that she could not. She was overwhelmed with self-consciousness at the thought of doing so. She glanced at him, almost furtively. He sat there, debonair and elegant as always, half smiling.

"No, you are like a bright flower, and you'll always just sway on your slender stalk, and people will come and look and look, and then go away and take—only memories."

She knew that he was not serious, but she was unaccountably moved. She felt as though she would like to cry—or sing. She sprang up.

"Come, Félix, I want to just *pound* the piano—get the music."

There were two pianos at Frau von Ernst's, and he had sent for a new four-handed concerto which had just arrived.

"I thought," she said, unfurling a scarlet parasol as they left the house, "it would be nice to walk."

"But if you're so anxious to get there——"

"Oh, no. Only to be moving. The terrace gave me the jumps."

"The terrace is a hanging garden and you're a dark young queen, a young Assyrian queen."

"Oh, something more ancient than that—what's the most mysterious and old of them all, Félix?"

"Who knows?" he replied abstractedly.

They walked slowly, and Félix carried the roll of music under his arm—like a student of the Latin quarter, Virginia said. They were soon out of the fashionable parts of Columbia, and making their way along the leafy, quiet streets of the older town. Virginia felt exquisitely content. Her sleeve as she walked touched that of her companion, and the contact gave

Cousin Julia

her a delicate pleasure. Never had she felt so intimate with Lorme, so almost one with him. The town seemed to take on a certain unfamiliarity. She did not feel in the least as though she were in Columbia. They might be anywhere, perhaps in some older and more romantic city of Europe, infinitely removed from the candid solidity, the clean, well-regulated domesticity of the house in Highland Road. Félix, with his music roll, and she might have been young artists, poor, unknown, living on bad claret and Swiss cheese in an enchanted garret, with the glories of their unachieved careers shining above them, like white mountain peaks above the clouds.

"It must be awfully cozy to be poor," she exclaimed.

He laughed.

"I've often felt that way, but that's one of the convictions nobody ever lives up to, if they can help it."

"I mean, to start being poor, and then get rich and famous—like Adelina Patti, and that sort of people, you know. Did you ever live in the Latin quarter, Félix?"

"No, but I know it, of course, what's left of it."

"It must be adorable!" she exclaimed naïvely. "I'd love to live there and study music."

Again Félix laughed.

"They call me Mimi, I know not why," he hummed.

Her hand, hanging beside her, touched his. Their fingers closed over each other's half playfully, and swinging their clasped hands back and forth with a carelessness, on her part at least, only half assumed, they arrived at Frau von Ernst's.

XXXI

THE little black dog, very much under the weather today, was keeping Panot company in the drawing-room. Rheumatism had him in its grip, and he was swathed in flannel wrappings and stabled on a large cushion in the sunniest corner of the room. He kept his sharp old eyes on all that went on in the garden, however, on the buzzing stupid bluebottles and sailing dragon flies that he snapped at still when he was well and out, but didn't seem to catch as often now as he had in other days. From time to time Panot addressed him with assumed severity in French, requesting him not to be so noisy, or taunting him with the fights he might be engaged in had he not chosen to play sick and get himself coddled. At such times the little dog turned his lean face to the old man, and lowering his ears and half closing his eyes, smiled at his friend in token of perfect understanding.

He was delighted to see Virginia, but could only stretch out his head to her, waving it back and forth like a small emaciated sea lion. She bent over him and patted his nose, and pulled one of his soft black ears through her fingers ever so gently, for he shrank in his suffering from even the lightest caress. Panot was as usual at his cards, but he rose to greet them, and then made as though he would go.

"Don't go, Monsieur Panot," Virginia exclaimed. "Stay and hear us play, Félix on the grand piano and me on the upright in the hall. *Qu'est-ce que ça vous dit?*"

Cousin Julia

"Not at all," put in Lorme. "You take the grand, of course."

An argument ensued, ending by Félix having his way.

"Am I not to have my own way as I always do?" she exclaimed, and he answered,

"You would never have it if you were married to me."

She flushed a little, and answered lightly,

"Indeed! You've no idea how angry I can get!"

"You might often be angry, but you would never be bored. Nothing bores a woman so much as getting her own way."

She was about to remind him that he always let Louise have hers, but did not do so. It occurred to her what a different wife she would make from Louise—what a different wife for him! But, what thoughts were these, she asked herself! For one passionate moment it flashed through her mind that she wished it had been she, she longed to feel herself at his command, she dared to imagine a subjugation to him. The hot blood fled from her cheeks back to her heart, and she stood with starlit eyes, in startled wonderment at herself. Back of her was Lorme, turning over some sheets of music. Suddenly, the girl's eyes met Panot's. He had been looking at her shrewdly, but turned at once to the window.

"I've set up your part, Virginia," her brother-in-law remarked. "Let's hear you play that *andante*."

She went to the piano and sat down. At first she was confused and played stupidly, but soon the splendid theme took possession of her. She became less conscious of herself and of the man who stood near her, watching her. Her emotion merged itself into the music, and she played with fine intensity.

Cousin Julia

Félix nodded approvingly, and so did the old man who knew nothing at all about it.

"Now wait a moment, and we'll begin together," said the former, taking his place at the other piano, which stood by the entrance of the drawing-room. They played together for some time. Panot listened with an enraptured expression, though as a rule he rather disliked music. But he adored Virginia, and could have nothing but admiration for Lorme, who was that cream of the cream, both a Frenchman and an aristocrat! So he beat time with a shabby foot, and rejoiced that they should have asked him to listen to it. His magpie brain was busy with conjectures and recollections of its own. After the last movement, Félix came back into the room.

"I don't altogether agree with you about this part," he said, and leaning on the piano, bent forward to explain his reading of the finale. Virginia looked up at him, her face radiant with a strange happiness, the happiness his proximity gave her, long unrecognized, but which she was perilously near to discovering.

The room was full of sunlight. It glowed on the bright patterns of the chintzes, and sank warmly into the deep glaze of the Chinese porcelains. Through the long open windows came the wandering scents and busy insect sounds of the garden. M. Panot resumed his game, turning from time to time his bright, beady glance upon the absorbed couple. Then, somewhere in the house, the telephone rang. Lorme, to illustrate better what he had been saying, sat down next to Virginia on the bench, and with abominable technique and thorough understanding crashed out the passages upon which they differed. The ringing at the telephone stopped, and in a moment an elderly maid who had

Cousin Julia

grown old in Frau von Ernst's service entered the room.

"It was a message from your house, Miss Virginia. Mr. Collingsworth arrived in town unexpectedly and is coming here to fetch you."

"Tom!" said Virginia, rising uncertainly to her feet. Tom coming here! It didn't seem quite possible. She had thought of him as so far away, or rather she had not thought of him at all, and for so long! And now she felt that, above all things, she did not wish to see him. For an instant she stood as she had risen, trying to adjust herself to his arrival, and her delicate black eyebrows were drawn together in a frown.

Félix got up, and taking a cigarette, walked over to the old man, who was staring at Virginia.

"A match, Panot?" he inquired.

Virginia left the piano still somber. She felt unaccountably angry.

"I don't think you played it right at all," she said petulantly.

"Why do you say that?" He crossed the room to where she stood by the window.

"You take it too fast."

"Why do you think so?"

"Why, why—how tiresome of you, Félix, to ask me why all the time. Do you ask why for everything you do?"

"Usually not till after I've done it." He laughed, but did not win an answering smile from her. She stood looking out into the garden, and at the seat where she had sat and wept and wept and laughed at the tears in Panot's beard, years before. She did not think of that time now, but Panot did.

"Where did you say Liebe Frau had gone, M. Panot?" Virginia asked.

Cousin Julia

He explained that he had not told her, as she had not inquired, and before he could finish answering her question, the hum of a motor was heard at the gate. A moment later Louise made her unexpected appearance in the drawing-room, followed by Tom.

She was beautifully dressed in white lace, with touches of old blue and rose, and wore a great drooping hat. Tom went at once to Virginia and put his big arm around her shoulders.

"Virgie, I've been wild to see you!" he murmured.

"I," Louise observed, "was just starting for the Driving Club when Tom arrived. He didn't have his car and was in such a hurry to see you, Virginia, that I brought him here. Besides, I owe Liebe Frau a visit, so I wanted to come. Is she at home?" She sat down, spreading her skirts daintily.

Virginia said no, rather shortly.

"That's too bad, I'm sorry. Virgie, you and Félix are horribly messy-looking. It's much too hot for the piano. That's one of the reasons why I don't like it."

Félix turned to her.

"Having given——" but she interrupted him.

"Why, there's that dirty little dog on a sofa cushion! Isn't that like Liebe Frau!"

"Having given Tom a lift," her husband pursued, "will you give me one now, Louise?"

"Why, I don't know. Where are you going? Tom was coming my way. Besides, I was quite proud of him. You're an awfully dashing beau for a young married woman, Tom," she went on, smiling at him. "Virgie, I find him very handsome."

Tom got foolishly red, but looked pleased.

"You're quite a peach yourself, you know, my beau-

Cousin Julia

tiful sister-in-law," he replied, giving her an appreciative look.

Louise glanced complacently at her reflection in an oval mirror across the room. She did look well, and she felt that her manner today was very successful—rather like Violet Tillinghurst's. There were times, she believed, when she was really not unlike Violet, especially here in Columbia. Here she was conscious of possessing experiences rather grander than most of the people about her had enjoyed, and was more acutely aware of being a marquise. It all gave her a poise, made her mistress of herself, she felt—quite a *grande dame*, in fact.

"Félix, please," she went on, moistening her lips lightly, "go away somewhere and don't make these young lovers miserable. You're always tied to poor Virginia's apron strings, and it must bore her frightfully having to look after you so much."

"A most helpful suggestion, my dear Louise. I'm only waiting for you."

Just then Louise's eyes fell on Panot, whom she had previously ignored. She nodded to him.

"Is that you, M. Panot? How do you do?"

He rose and bowed stiffly, furious at her neglect and at the embarrassment it had caused him. She was about to turn away indifferently when something occurred to her. Always a prey to curiosity, she did not bother to use what tact she had except with people of importance.

"By the way, M. Panot, my hairdresser tells me that you are married, that she knows a Mrs. Panot. Is that true?"

The careless question fell harshly on the quiet of the room. Virginia stifled an exclamation of annoyance.

Cousin Julia

Panot, whose face had reddened painfully, gave a slight shrug and replied,

“Since your servant has already told you, Madame ——” He finished his sentence with another shrug, and turning quietly, shambled out of the room. His private life held much that was painful, much that he preferred should be ignored. With all the warped intensity of which he was capable, he resented the question, a question implying that his wife, if he had one, was a dubious and concealed nobody, the friend of one’s hairdresser. That it should be put to him here, in Frau von Ernst’s house, where he came as a specially privileged guest, the equal of everyone, was the very dregs of its bitterness, and the dislike he had always felt for Louise turned to loathing. His worn felt hat sat on its accustomed peg in the hall, but he stared at it for a moment as if he’d never seen it before. Then, still in a daze of angry mortification, he took it down, and planting it on his head, went out of the house.

“What a rude old person,” Louise observed when he had gone. “I can’t think what Frau von Ernst is thinking about having such queer people in her house the whole time.”

“Louise, how could you say what you did to him!” exclaimed Virginia.

“Why not? It’s a very natural question. Is he married or is he not?”

“I don’t know, and it’s absolutely none of our business.”

“I’m sure that it’s just as well that it isn’t!” she returned, rising. “Come along, Félix. I expect that I’ll have to put you down somewhere.”

XXXII

WHEN they were alone, Tom turned to Virginia eagerly, and took her in his arms. He did not kiss her at first. He had to give himself a moment to realize that he was really with her again, that his arms which had been so empty again enfolded her.

The simple tenderness of his mood was intensely grateful to the girl. Her head drooped to his shoulder wearily, and a tremulous sigh escaped her.

"What is it, dear?" he said, laying his hand protectingly on her cheek. "Aren't you well? I thought you looked pale when I came in."

"I'm tired," she murmured.

It occurred to Virginia how fond she was of him, how much she wished they could be friends, without this terrible question of a sentiment between them she could not reciprocate. For one reckless moment she considered confiding her distress to him, telling him the whole truth about their engagement, ugly though she felt it to be, and receiving the solace of his kindness and strength. But some instinct told her that his tenderness had its roots in passion, in a love that desired love, not friendship, from her; that if she told him she rejected that love, dreaded that passion, he would receive the knowledge with anger and bitterness. Besides, could she betray her promise to her mother, ought she to imperil the security of a family to which she had been told she owed so much? If what her

Cousin Julia

mother said was true, her father, Louise, Félix—Félix, too—would suffer. She dismissed the thought restlessly. That she should marry to help support Félix! Somehow, it was grotesque, wrong. He, she felt, would be the first to scorn such an arrangement. Again she sighed, deeply.

“Virgie!” exclaimed her lover. “What a sad little sweetheart, you are today—let me look at you.”

He turned around, and taking her face between his hands, intended to search her eyes for the secret of her weariness, but he saw only the red mouth he adored, and kissed her instead.

“It’s late, Tom,” she said after a moment, drawing away from him.

“Yes, by Jove!” he ejaculated. “Liebe Frau will be coming in, and then we’ll have to stay and talk. Let’s beat it.”

She got her hat and sunshade.

“I left word for them to send a car,” he remarked. “Must be here by now.”

“Then we can take a little ride, it will do me good,” she replied. “I—I don’t think I feel very well.”

“Look here, Virgie,” he said after they were seated, “I expected to have to be off again tomorrow night. But if you’re going to be sick, I won’t go. I was only hurrying things so’s to be back a little sooner.”

“It’s really nothing, Tom. Of course you must go when you planned to.”

“I’ll tell you what we’ll do tomorrow, Angel,” he observed presently. “We’ll motor out to Lake End for lunch, just you and I. It’s high and cool up there and will freshen you up a bit. Will you do it?”

“Yes,” she said, smiling, “if you’ll let me go to bed very early tonight.”

Cousin Julia

"I don't know about that," he returned, grabbing her hand surreptitiously and kissing it.

Virginia came down late the next day, giving her fatigue as an excuse, and found Tom smoking endless cigarettes on the terrace. He had just lighted a fresh one when she appeared, but tossed it away delightedly at sight of her.

"By Jiminy, old girl, you're certainly looking fit this morning. Is that a new dress? I thought you'd never come down!"

"I'm sorry. Are you all alone?"

"I should say I am! Your mother had to step out, to build an orphan asylum, and old Lorme was as fidgety as a French poodle——"

"Tom!"

"That's all right, only a figure of speech. 'As a matter of fact, I like that chap, he has a sort of charm about him."

"Where did you say he was?" she said casually.

"I didn't say, but I believe he took himself off to the club for an all-day bridge debauch. I'd like to play bridge with him, I have an idea he's a good one."

He approached her, and taking both her hands in his, added, "How many times are you going to let me kiss you today?"

"As few times as possible, Mr. Collingsworth, you may be sure," she replied with an attempted gayety, and turning, walked rather hurriedly through the drawing-room and out to the door where one of Tom's motors awaited them.

He had a passion for automobiles, and was constantly selling and trading those he had and buying new ones. Today he had brought a touring car he had

Cousin Julia

had sent on from New York to surprise her. It was a new model with the low, sporting body that was just beginning to be seen. A driver in smart livery sat in the front seat.

"What a splendid turnout, Tom!" she said. It was a careless remark, but he beamed with pleasure at her approval.

On the way to the lake, he entertained Virginia with an account of the affair that was keeping him flying about the country, and which involved, so far as she could follow what he said, buying one railroad and putting another out of business. At first she was interested, some of the details were rather dramatic, but by and by it palled on her. She encouraged him, however, as it kept his mind away from personal topics. She wondered, too, about Félix, whom he had found to play bridge with him in the morning, and whether he would be home to dinner. He had gone out the evening before, and it seemed, somehow, a long time since she had seen him.

"You're not listening to a word I'm saying, Virgie," Tom exclaimed suddenly. "Of course all this stuff wouldn't interest you."

"But it does, indeed it does," she protested.

There was a pause. She feared she had hurt him by her inattention, and wanted to make amends. Yet she was at a loss for something to say. Then a question which she had often considered occurred to her.

"Tom, I wonder sometimes why it is," she said, "that you want so much to make more money when you have such quantities already."

This amused Collingsworth. He laughed.

"Soon be French frocks to pay for," he answered jestingly, squeezing her hand.

Cousin Julia

"How absurd you are, Tom!" she exclaimed, taking her hand from him gently. "But you know what I mean. You couldn't possibly spend half of what you have now, and I think it's so strange that you can take any interest in getting more."

"Well," he replied somewhat more seriously, "I never thought about that. You've got to do something, I suppose. You'd get awfully sick of golf and polo and bridge all the time."

"There are politics," she said tentatively.

"Oh, politics, what's the use? Have much more power if you're not in them. It's a dirty game, and if you're rich enough you can pull the strings and stay out of the mess."

"That doesn't seem right, somehow," she answered interestedly. "Why must they be dirty? I don't think we ought to be content to know that what governs us is just a dirty mess."

"That's because you don't understand those things, darling. Politics are rotten. Always have been rotten, always will be rotten."

"Have you much power, Tom?"

"Oh, I don't know," he answered carelessly. "Some, I guess."

He paused, thinking of what she had said in the beginning. It was just the sort of thing she would say, nobody else thought of those things, and it was concrete enough to hold his interest. At last he remarked,

"And about making money. Of course when a business is as big as ours, you don't really work to make money to spend. As you say, you've got enough already."

"Then, why——"

"Well, I don't know. I guess you just like to put things over."

Cousin Julia

Virginia perceived, through the colloquial vagueness of his answer, what he meant, and it struck her as being a somewhat feeble motive for one's life work. She compared him with De Lorme—it was a habit she had fallen into lately, that of measuring all standards by what she supposed to be his. Félix certainly was not working six days out of seven to “put something over.” What *was* his motive, then? She told herself that to acquire knowledge, or wisdom rather than knowledge, to broaden his understanding and sympathies, to penetrate as deeply as possible to the very core of life, was his ruling passion. An innate fairness, however, made her admit that *he* didn't have to put things over because Louise's father did that for him. But then, neither did Tom have to, so she was back where she had started.

Meanwhile the motor sped smoothly along the dirt road. It was a windy, disagreeable day, and the dust flew into Virginia's eyes and gritted between her teeth. Her hat tore wildly at its moorings—it seemed impossible to keep it on her head at all—and her hair whipped into her eyes and glued itself to her moist lips. She was intensely uncomfortable. It took some strength of character, absurd as it would be, not to blame all this on Tom. She wanted to feel that it was his fault, and be rude to him and hurt him, but she controlled herself. She forced herself to remember that, as a matter of fact, there was nothing on earth he would not do, if it were in his power, to spare her discomfort, and that they were only there because he had thought it would amuse her. Kindliness radiated from him, and his ingenuous high spirits shamed her into a concealment of her irritation.

But she found it impossible to keep on talking under

Cousin Julia

these conditions, and without her help their little discussion ended. Tom, however, found ample occupation in observing the performance of the car, certain of the simpler features of which he explained to Virginia. He was charmed by its speed and quietness and various virtues he always discovered in automobiles he had just bought, and leaned forward from time to time to discuss its other and more mysterious characteristics with the driver. Virginia felt toward him suddenly as she might have toward a well-meaning stranger, and it struck her as being inconceivable that she had known him for years and was shortly going to marry him.

The inn at Lake End, where they were to have lunch, was a rehabilitated farmhouse, and belonged originally to a family that had long since disappeared from the community. It was a rambling, pleasant frame building, commanding a good view of the lake and surrounding country—a region of rolling farm and meadow lands. It was, ordinarily, a place of great beauty and tranquillity, and one which Virginia loved. But when she arrived today after a drive of more than an hour, she found its charm utterly destroyed by the exasperating activities of the wind, which clawed at her hair and clothing, slapped shutters against the walls, overturned chairs on the porch, and whistled through the trees that waved their tortured branches in vain protest. She found it more and more difficult to keep her temper.

The luncheon was, of necessity, served inside, and Virginia had to admit that it was a good one. As a matter of fact she was delicately greedy of good things to eat, and Tom rather made a point of his understanding and discretion in the matter of food. He had carefully telephoned out the night before and ordered the

Cousin Julia

meal in detail. The fresh mushrooms and brook trout and pigeons and other specialties of the locality were all that could be desired, and his satisfaction was complete. He was having, he declared, the time of his life, and seemed comfortably convinced that Virginia was also having the time of hers. He was not troubled with nerves, and the dusty havoc and tumult of the wind left him serene.

"We'll find a shady place out of doors after we've finished," he said. "Don't you remember those corking little places with benches we sat in last time?"

"Out of doors in this awful wind!"

She looked at him resentfully. How stupid to suggest sitting out on the top of a hill in a tornado! Besides, she had been vaguely annoyed because Tom, in the exuberance of his holiday mood, had taken two cocktails before, and several glasses of claret with, his lunch. She wondered if he had got into the habit of drinking a good deal. He seemed, certainly, to betray no traces of it. His skin and eyes were clear, and there was about his whole person the air of an athlete in good trim. Nevertheless, she felt that it was silly and harmful to drink two cocktails. At the same time, she realized that today she was inclined to be unfair to Tom, was endeavoring to see him in the most unfavorable light, that a new and subtle antagonism had crept into her attitude toward him. But she could not overcome it.

"It is blowing a bit, isn't it?" he replied genially. "Want the top put up before we go back?"

"Oh, yes, by all means!" she replied emphatically.

Virginia found it very dull after luncheon. She refused utterly to go out and give herself into the clutches of the gale, and they sat for a while in the

Cousin Julia

dreary inn parlor. The day was too warm for the large, uninhabited-looking room to be brightened and cheered by a grate fire, and, shorn of its sunlight by the surrounding porches, it was filled with a hard, daylight gloom. They had not much to say to each other. Tom never bothered himself to converse. He talked when he had something to tell about, but the discussion of general topics bored him, except with a group of men. And at that the range of subjects was limited—politics, sport, business. Women, he felt, were different, they did not inspire him conversationally. Just now, he would have liked to make love to Virginia, but this did not seem to be quite the moment. She had enshrouded herself in aloofness, doubtless because of the publicity of the apartment. So he ordered a large, fragrant cigar and puffed it contentedly.

Virginia's slender foot tapped the floor in a slight emphatic staccato, and she said to herself, "This is a sample of matrimony with Tom. If he had ten times as much money, we couldn't have eaten any more, we can only ride home in one motor," and the thought of all the vast superfluity of wealth piling up, that they couldn't possibly spend and she wouldn't be allowed to give away, bored her immensely. There would be jewels—pounds of them; clothes—deserts of them; great, thickly carpeted rooms; ease, servants, stagnation. Gone was the keen zest of the day before, with its dreams of artistic poverty, its quick imaginings, its strange, intoxicating unfulfillment—

On the ride home she was silent. She suffered her hand to lie in his large grasp, and part of the time his arm was about her—the kisses he took an unmagnetized contact of flesh with flesh.

XXXIII

COLLINGSWORTH was to leave on an early train that same evening. He dined, however, with the Bradfords, all of whom were at home except Louise. J. C. was in exceptionally good spirits and became actually loquacious. He talked business with Tom and made one or two affectionate jokes with Virginia, but said very little to Lorme. His limited conversation was at all times even more limited with his son-in-law, who, notwithstanding the perfection of his manner toward the older man, never succeeded in evoking any spontaneity from their intercourse. Virginia was pale and silent. The world seemed suddenly upside down to her and she had not yet had time to think it out. She only knew she would be relieved when Tom had gone. She had felt that way at times before, but never with the intensity and finality she now experienced. Across the table was Félix, and she liked to look up and let her glance meet his, and receive his smile. Tom sat beside her in unconscious enjoyment of his dinner, his prospective father-in-law's conversation and that of Lorme, whom he found amusing, and of his nearness to Virginia.

Mrs. Bradford, imperturbable at the head of her table, ate her whitefish and leg of lamb sparingly. She would have preferred eating nothing, but acted upon one of those obscure, perverted little manifestations of economy which prompted her always to eat something of what was before her, whether she was hungry or not.

Cousin Julia

She never required of her family that they "eat things to save them" as the phrase goes, but pursued, probably unconsciously, that remarkable policy herself. Doubtless this was the cause of the only weak spot in her otherwise robust health. She even tonight sipped a little of the champagne J. C. had insisted on having for Collingsworth. She glanced intently, from time to time, at the faces about her.

When the sweet came in Tom got up and made his excuses—there was barely time to catch the train. He said good-by to the rest and then turned to Virginia. She made no move to leave the table. Her mother glanced at her sharply. The look was instantaneous and then Mrs. Bradford's eyes returned to her plate.

"You may be excused, too, Virginia," she said crisply. "I suppose you want to see Tom off."

The girl rose obediently. Unconsciously her eyes sought Lorme's, but he was not looking at her. She left the room with Collingsworth.

"Virginia," he whispered, pulling her into a little writing room and letting the portières drop behind them, "you're not angry with me for being away so much? Lord! I wouldn't go if I could help it! You must know that!"

He put both arms around her and held her close.

"Sweetheart, this is the last time I'll go—alone!"

His lips found hers, and he kissed her again and again, and then he was gone. She stood for a moment quite still in the little dark room where he had left her. She could not bear to go back to the dining room with those unreturned kisses burning her lips. Instead, she went to the terrace and sat down. In the south the moon was rising, and the flowers and shrubs wore an air of enchantment under the strange purity of the

Cousin Julia

evening sky. The girl threw her arms upward and then drew her hands back and laid her hot face between them. She wanted to think, but could not. She could feel only a pain at her heart and a tumult within her. Presently her mother appeared, and stood without speaking in the open doorway. She was followed by her husband and Félix.

"Mother," remarked J. C., "get your things on, and we'll walk over to the Judge's."

About twice a year Mr. Bradford suggested to his wife that they walk over to the Judge's, and she had never refused to participate in this unique dissipation. But tonight, for a moment, she hesitated.

"Hurry up," said J. C.; "the Judge don't keep the hours we do in this house, you know."

"All right, Jim, I'll come."

Her eyes lingered a moment irresolutely upon Virginia, and then she turned away. "My scarf's in the hall, I guess."

They disappeared into the house and Virginia and Félix were alone on the terrace. He stood with his back to the railing looking down at her, and the smoke rose in a thin straight line from his cigarette. The peace of the white evening entered into Virginia.

"How light it is," she said softly, "and the sky is the color of pearls!"

He did not answer. He looked, she thought, sad, and it seemed to her at the moment quite natural that he should. Why should he not, why should everyone not be sad, in a world where things got into such sorry tangles? Herself and Collingsworth, for example. Until a few moments before, how miserable she had been! Why was it, she asked herself, that she no longer felt so? Nothing was changed. Her future stood before

Cousin Julia

her, as always, empty of inspiration. But now, in the twilight alone with this man, she had forgotten it all and was happy. She watched the smoke from his cigarette ascending thinly, unruffled by a breath of wind.

"It's like incense," she said, pointing to it, "on a distant altar."

"It is incense," he replied.

She said nothing. His remark seemed simply to hasten her thoughts whither they were tending. Again she said to herself, "I am happy with him." She thought of the weeks they had spent so much together. She had been happy, happier than ever before. And without him—ah, without him! She closed her eyes, as, at the turn of the road, one might close one's eyes to the sea, whose approaching murmurs and far outline one had at last overtaken. She knew now, but her eyes were still closed to the final vision. She must, of course, open them soon and face the deeps of her life that she had at last attained, but she shrank from it, still listening to the murmurs.

"Virginie"—he spoke her name in the French way—"Virginie, may I tell you how lovely you are lying there—how beautiful and wan, like a sorrowing princess?. The night," he bent toward her, "the night is already in your hair, it's so black, and the daylight is dying in your face. Ah, Virginie!"

He stretched out his hand as though he would have touched her, and then let it drop by his side. She was facing it at last. She saw too clearly now what had murmured unknown music to her. It had been love, love more overwhelming, more beautiful than she had ever dreamed it could be—more beautiful and more tragic. Her heart dissolved in love for him, for this man who had magically touched her spirit and made it

Cousin Julia

live, the man who now, as he had years before when, an unawakened girl, she stood at life's gates, thrilling to the mysteries that lay within, unveiled to her dazzled eyes a vision of beauty and romance. When he spoke again his voice was tense and restrained.

"When," he said, "are you going to marry Collingsworth?"

"I shall never marry him, Félix, not Tom or anyone."

The silence that followed this avowal was almost violent. It seemed to Virginia that he must hear the thumping of her heart and the racing of her blood through her temples.

"My heart," she said with a faint smile, "my heart is beating too loud."

"Virgie! How can I keep silent! How can I! How can I! Look at your hand like a white flower lying there, and I may not even touch it!"

She raised her eyes to him, heavy with the passion and longing that had suddenly overwhelmed her. To have given him her hands or her lips would have seemed to her at that moment, in so far as they two were concerned, inexpressibly right. A love such as hers, she felt, could not be and still be wrong. It consumed all unworthiness in its own clear flame. And his voice, his eyes, the very words he crushed back as he looked at her in silence, told her that he loved her, and quite, she believed, as she loved him.

But—he was her sister's husband. He, it was true, was nothing, really, to Louise, and Louise was less than nothing to him, but the fact was there, irrevocable and not to be evaded. This love that had come to them unbidden must remain forever unfulfilled within their hearts. The youth in her rose to this white romance

Cousin Julia

of renunciation. With age so often comes a cynical belief in seizing the good moments and living them to their utmost—they are so few and life is very long. But she was young. She felt that to tend the altar where her love lay sacrificed would fill her life, if not with happiness, at least with meaning and reality, and from its lifting smoke she would fashion her ideals. Their actions, hers and his, and their words must yield to unescapable conventions, but their souls were free.

"That's all there is for us," she said aloud; "just to know."

"Yes," he replied, "that's all."

"I'm going," she went on, rising, "to write to him now, to tell him that I cannot marry him. I feel that I must do it at once."

She stood, wistfully slender, turned toward the glow of careful, shaded light that proceeded from her mother's sophisticated, yellow drawing-room—a light that mingled oddly with the early moonlight.

"Virginia, tell me," he said passionately, placing himself before her, "since we are not to speak of it again, just tell me that you know a little how much I——"

"I do, I do!" she broke in. "But I mustn't hear you say it, not even now. Not to hear it once," she repeated sadly, "from you who are to me the whole earth and heaven and the stars!"

They stood for an instant face to face in the dusk, looking deep into each other's eyes. Virginia was white and grave, and slowly two tears crept down her cheeks.

"My dear, my little love," he murmured, and tried to draw her to him.

"No, no—good-night," she said chokingly, and turned away. Lorme stood where she had left him,

Cousin Julia

following her progress through the muted room. In an instant she had vanished, but he seemed to see her still, mounting the broad stairway with all her bewitching grace of movement, that grace which was always such a poignant memory of her, that and the deer-like head and slender sensuous body. The vision faded, and he became again aware of the yellow drawing-room into which he was staring. It reminded him of Violet Tillinghurst and he frowned. He turned quickly away, eager to dismiss inopportune memories, and feeling for his case, lighted a cigarette, and threw himself into the chair where Virginia had just now been sitting. He liked to think that her cheek had touched the pillow beneath his head, that her slim, curving arm had lain along the strip of creaking willow still warm from its touch, where his arm now lay. He closed his eyes, and drawing the smoke in deeply with his breath, gave himself to the sensations of this perfumed love affair.

Why, he thought at first, had he not held out for Virginia on that evening years before, when Mrs. Bradford had so *crânement* made clear to him that Louise was the better bargain? She would have been his now, his wife. Still, would even that have given him for long the ecstasy his restless imagination, his fastidious sensuousness, pursued? Marriage spoiled so many things! Yet now, how madly he wanted her! How completely she enchanted him! Her presence ministered to him like a sun-filled, sweet-smelling day, under tall pine trees overlooking a purple sea. He was in love, in love as he had feared a various wasting of emotion had emptied him of the power to be, more in love than he had ever been.

He was dreamer and epicure enough to know that, though perhaps balked of the fulfillment, he had the

Cousin Julia

greater thing, the poetry of his longing, and the supreme delight of having conquered. He had won her! She loved him as she would not love again. Even now she was upstairs writing to that nice, athletic young millionaire to tell him that she could not give her consuming heart to him. Lorme felt that living was, on the whole, an immensely agreeable adventure.

A faint breeze sprang up from somewhere, bringing him scents of overblown clover drowned in dew. His thoughts left immediate things, and sought impalpable beauties. Fragments of half-forgotten poetry came to him, and looking up, the thrilling magnitude of distance hurled its greater romance at him from the unimaginable stars.

XXXIV

S CARCELY conscious of what she was doing, Virginia, when she left Lorme, mounted the broad staircase slowly and went into her room. The house was close and silent. Mechanically she turned on a light, and mechanically unfastened her thin gown and let it slip to the floor. She wanted to free herself from her garments—they encumbered her, and she had had them on, it seemed, an infinity of time. The letter, too, she was in a hurry to write. She was anxious to get it over with and send it away, so that at last, in a solitude that had suddenly acquired a value it had never before possessed, she would be at liberty to think—to read over and over the page of her romance that had at last been written. Down there on the terrace she had had only a glance at it, a fearful, rapturous, anguished glance, full of withdrawal and renunciation. But now she could read its every word, discover in it new beauties, new sadness, and make its heartbreak and its ecstasies her own. First, however, she would accomplish the letter—free her perspective from this last false landmark. She wrote quickly:

DEAR TOM:

It has all been a mistake. I have learned that I do not love you as I should, and that I never have. Forgive me. You have been so kind and good, and I like you more than anybody, but oh, Tom, I do not love you, and this is good-by for always.

VIRGINIA.

Cousin Julia

That was all. It did not occur to her that the letter was cruel, that her action was cruel, that he would suffer. Indeed, so absorbed was she, so possessed by her new emotion, that she scarcely gave him a thought of any kind. Nothing, perhaps, can be so ruthless and unmerciful as youth. The letter written—she would take it down before she slept—Virginia turned absently to her mirror, and stood for a moment staring at herself in the glass. Her face looked strange to her, almost as though she were looking at it now for the first time. The queer sense of unfamiliarity fascinated—held her spellbound, and gradually an unprecedented sensation overcame her. Whose were those wide, dark eyes that looked back into hers? Who indeed was *she*—Virginia? *Virginia!* she repeated wonderingly. She had been that night profoundly stirred and the intensity of her excitement moved her, for a heartbeat of time, from the usual state of unquestioning acceptance of one's self—of the fact of one's being that makes it possible to live sanely in this riddle of existence. The pupils of her eyes widened, swam to the very outer rim of the gray iris. For a fleeting instant it seemed to her that she became two persons, one the Virginia who ate and dressed and thought and planned her little life from day to day, and then another—a stranger, aloof and cool, not yet grasped by her consciousness, but whom, elusive as a dream, she sensed in the strange remoteness of the steady glance that returned hers. What did it mean? Just an instant more, she thought, and she would know. She waited breathless for the answer—the moment of revelation. But none came. And then the tension broke and she slipped back to normality. The memory of her love and of Félix rushed over her. She smiled and, picking up her

Cousin Julia

brush, ran it idly through her soft, curling hair. It was thick and beautiful, she told herself, and he had said it held the night in its black shadows. She put out the light and sank into a chair close to the wide-open window.

In and out of the close room wandered the wraith of a breeze, faint, but snowy in its coolness. Impulsively she pushed open the screen and leaned far out, to bathe her senses in the summer night, that had always held such magic for her. A piece of yellow moon slid, upside down, through a pansy-dark sky, just yonder, it seemed, behind a screen of rustling poplars, clapping their thousand hands in silent mirth at his descent. All her life Virginia had loved the night and marveled at its great, empty loveliness. Had asked herself: Why is all this beauty, why do I perceive it and feel it? And yet, why does it bring me only just so much pleasure and no more—why does it leave me lonely, with vague longings, and the aching sense of a promise unfulfilled? And tonight it seemed to her that at last she knew, for she was young, passionate and thwarted, three things that make for heroics. She felt that she had discovered that this dark exquisiteness was a setting, a background for love, and that she had found in love the soul of the world's beauty. Her pleasure in it was no longer troubled by a restless questioning, a sense of isolation; she was no longer a spectator, filled with a yearning loneliness. The sweetness, the trouble, the triumph of her love, at last filled that vast silence with its ardent music.

She leaned her face against the window jamb, and her folded hands hung out over the sill. Again she seemed to hear Félix speaking to her, and she thrilled to the memory of his warm, resonant tones, so totally

Cousin Julia

unlike the voice of any other man. She recalled his face, which had always seemed to her so beautiful, the captivating nonchalance of his manner, his intellectual supremacy, and most of all his eyes with their caressing glance, so understanding, so humorous, so thrillingly dominant. She did not envisage the future. She was, for the moment, utterly satisfied by the mere knowledge of their love, and she was so inexperienced that she felt no fear, no misgiving as to her strength or his. It was quite simple to do what was right, quite simple to transform the flame of passion into an altar fire. The very sacrifice had its own pleasure, inspirational and wonderfully sweet. Her nobility would emulate his; they would have, if not life together, at least the sacred tie of self-sacrifice and duty highly performed. No further look or word should betray Louise. If tonight they had sinned, the rest of their lives should be its expiation, and it would not be so hard, with the dear certainty in her heart of his love, and of hers for him, Félix, her gifted, seductive, transcendent lover.

Perhaps it was not ill for her to have had one of those golden moments of high resolve, when the spirit of Sir Galahad and his White Knights kindles one's own, and the dreams and illusions and aspirations that have lent a confused glory to the fanatic and the poet since the world began, trail, in passing, their wings across one's path. The time might come later when Virginia could say to herself that, no matter how misguided or preposterous or even wrong the crusade may be, if we believe it right and high, we have received its ministry; and when she would learn, too, that life has a way of going on for most of us and showing us the dirt from which the flower has sprung—that it is from the desires of the flesh that the poet's song rises, and

Cousin Julia

that ignorance is the best fabric from which to fashion dreams.

But tonight she was alone with her romance, like a young knight, keeping vigil with prayers—less prayers than clouded enthusiasms—the Vigil of Arms in some Gothic chapel.

XXXV

I WONDER," said Mrs. Bradford, coming into the hall, "where the children are."

"Mooning out on that marble back porch of yours, I suppose," he replied with a twinkle. Once in a gala mood, J. C. carried it on to the end. "Louise home?" he then inquired, standing benignly at the bottom of the stairs, with one foot on the first step and his hand on the railing.

"How should I know, Jim?" said his wife. "I expect not. I don't think she planned to come home till after-tomorrow."

"Oh, ho! Well—coming?"

"Not just now."

Mr. Bradford proceeded upstairs slowly, bending slightly forward, with the half of a white silk handkerchief trailing from his coat pocket. His wife stood looking after him unseeingly, aware, vaguely, of the handkerchief and aware, in her orderly soul, of being disturbed by it, but too absorbed in her preoccupations to mention it, or rather to tuck it in for him as she would ordinarily have done. Then she turned abruptly and walked through the empty drawing-room—empty of everything save the discreet yellow light and the night breeze that carried a faint odor of Turkish tobacco and stirred the fronds of a slender palm standing near the open French window.

"Are you there, Virgie?" said Mrs. Bradford, looking out on the dim terrace.

Cousin Julia

"She has gone up, *chère madame*," said Lorme, and the creaking chair bore witness to his rising. "Won't you come out?"

"She was early tonight," was the reply. Mrs. Bradford stepped out into the moonlight. "My sakes! I don't see how you can stand this sickly light!"

"How delightfully original of you to dislike moonlight!" he remarked. "I never hoped to meet a woman who did. I am enchanted!"

Mrs. Bradford accorded this remark a cold surprise. She sat down near the balustrade and her eyeglasses, which she held between her thumb and forefinger, caught the gleam of the despised moonlight. Félix re-seated himself. He was reminded, for some reason, of that other and momentous night years before, when she had brought about an interview with him, an interview so fertile in consequences! She was a strange woman, he told himself, and he wondered with amused curiosity whether she had anything in mind tonight. Probably not. Still, it might be that she did not like his going out so little with Louise and would speak of it. Her opening remark, however, was unexpected.

"How do you think J. C. is looking?" she demanded.

"Why, very well, very well indeed, and he seems in unusual spirits."

"He was in good spirits tonight." She paused, and then remarked baldly, "Business has been pretty bad lately."

"Oh, is that possible!" He spoke uncomfortably. Because of his and Louise's respective financial situations, he disliked very much having the subject mentioned. He was annoyed that Mrs. Bradford should do so.

"This marriage of Virginia's is a great comfort to

Cousin Julia

us all. Tom is such a fine fellow, and besides I won't disguise from you that it is a great help to J. C."

"Indeed," he observed rather frigidly, wishing to discourage any further discussion of the distasteful subject.

Mrs. Bradford, however, calmly resumed:

"A very great help, indeed," she repeated. She folded one eyeglass over the other and they closed with a snap. "There is to be some sort of partnership after the marriage, you see."

Lorme did not answer. His annoyance was mingled with a sense of vague disturbance.

"It will be," she went on, "very important to our interests—in fact, without it I really don't know—of course I'm anxious for it on Louise's account as much as anything."

He was still obstinately silent, conscious now of a dawning conflict of emotion.

"Virgie's so full of notions," continued Mrs. Bradford, "there's really no telling what she'll do. It'll certainly be a load off my mind when she's really married to him. The Collingsworth fortune is one of the biggest in the country and she'll be just as happy with him as with anyone. But there are times when I don't know whether she sees it that way." She sighed and got to her feet. "We'd none of us take well to being poor, I guess. Well, good-night."

Lorme saw his mother-in-law to the foot of the stairs and bade her good-night. She had inquired if he were waiting up for Louise—if he had heard that she was coming back that night. It was one of Louise's petty tyrannies over her family to change her plans frequently and tell them as little as possible about it.

Cousin Julia

He had said no, that he was going to have one cigar in the garden and then turn in.

He did not, however, light a cigar, but, folding his hands behind him, he walked back and forth in the graveled pathway bordered by clipped privet. What an interruption to his reveries! The change of mood was so abrupt that he did not at first grasp the full import of all that she had implied. Money in unfailing quantities had always been so much a part of his whole conception of the Bradfords that he could not suddenly believe that they, by any chance, could be threatened by a lack of it. Was it really possible that they *were* so threatened, and that he, through them, might have to return to the uneasy consideration of the odious subject? He had grown used very quickly to simply never thinking about it at all, which was to him the chief luxury of wealth. He was not a spendthrift, but he understood luxury, and after his marriage to Louise, had soon taken for granted a perfectly reliable bank balance, and entire independence in the matter of expenditure—an independence, for that matter, which he had always enjoyed until his father's death. The more money some people have the more they think about it, but Félix was emphatically not of that type. There was no tradesman streak in him. When his short, detested period of insolvency was ended by his marriage with Louise, he put from him utterly the question of dollars and cents, or rather, it receded quite naturally, from his consciousness. It was as though he had said:

“This little matter—vital but uninteresting—being settled, I can dismiss it entirely from my mind, and proceed to the business of living.” And now was he to find that his immunity from such annoyance was not so certain as he had supposed, that the fact of the Brad-

Cousin Julia

ford wealth was not cosmic—unalterable—but quite as human and precarious as other institutions? He felt suddenly cheated. Had he given Louise his name and his position, then, only to receive something far less staple in return? It was intolerable! Poverty again, and with Louise! Impossible! His imagination was deluding him with fears beyond the range of probability. Besides, and the idea which had escaped him for the moment returned with a sudden force, there was Collingsworth—and Virginia! That she should enter into it in this way was unspeakably distasteful to him, but the fact remained that she did enter into it, and vitally. He was not a sentimentalist, and he was inclined, temperamentally, to look facts in the face.

Pausing in his restless walk, he stood at the edge of the terrace, facing outward, and his eyes viewed, without seeing it, the dim prospect lying beneath him, faint in the night-blue mystery of the moonlight—in the distance, the even void that was the lake, and below, the valley, twinkling with a scattering of suburban lights. His long, slender fingers played with the glossy leaves of an exotic plant that blossomed thickly by the path, and broke them off one by one. Again the idea of Virginia possessed him. How bewitching she was, with her finesse, her grace, her red, enticing lips! How it had pleased him to capture her high spirit and make it his own, to see her gaze kindle and melt when it found his, and to hear in her voice the vibrant note of a new and profound emotion! And of what emotion was she not capable! That had been a magical moment with her on the terrace and the knowledge that he had won her was curiously sweet.

Then the accursed intrusion had come. Epicure of

Cousin Julia

sensation that he was, he resented fiercely the ugly discord Mrs. Bradford had wrought in his mood. Might not tonight at least have been his, in which to weave, if he would, a gossamer of dreams? Why had she come to him tonight—indeed, for that matter, why had she come at all—to *him*?

Just then, for the first time, a certain grotesque opportuneness appeared to him in this side thrust of information she had given him. Had she perceived anything? Had Virginia's strained coldness to her lover tonight seemed to Mrs. Bradford attributable to his, Félix's, influence? Was it possible that a person in many ways so dull, and who he would have supposed saw so little, had seen so much? Still, there was that other interview so long ago, when she had brought about his choice of Louise, an interview that bespoke a certain penetrating shrewdness. Back and forth, through the cool odors of the garden, he strode again, examining this new situation. That Mrs. Bradford was terribly anxious for the match, and fearful that everything was not going well, was apparent, and her coming to him with her perplexities looked, he decided, as though she suspected he had, to say the least, influence with Virginia. If so, gauging doubtless what was fundamentally mercenary in him by herself, she had deftly shown him where his best interests lay. To a certain extent Virginia's admiration for him was probably apparent enough, and if Mrs. Bradford fancied that it made her daughter look with less favor on her prospective husband, she would now feel quite safe in expecting Félix to use whatever influence he had to destroy that admiration and reinstate Collingsworth. What a beastly way, if that was in her mind, to go about it! And yet would any other appeal have been

Cousin Julia

as efficient, and, if listened to, as automatic in its working?

For a moment he contemplated the possibility of upsetting her calculations—if indeed she had any—and of proving her estimate of him wrong. He might persuade Virginia to go away with him, despite her purity and resolves. It would be possible, he thought, for he knew the sophistries and pitfalls of a headlong passion as she did not. But his was not the temperament nor the experience and above all not the love that could choose poverty and isolation for a woman. He had loved often, and he knew how easily, even under the most propitious conditions, and how unaccountably, love's fine edge can be blunted. Besides, love was not the whole of life. There were ideas, and books and gay adventures for men who did not love too much. No, things must go on as they were, and if they were to do so, there must be money. He would have to do what he could to throw this lovely, spirited, infinitely desirable creature back into the arms of Collingsworth.

This being the case, the best thing to do was to go away and at once. When his presence was no longer at hand for her affection to feed upon, he considered somewhat fatuously, or rather with more candor than fatuity, that it would diminish. He would leave without explanation and she would be hurt and then lonely, and eventually, he hoped, the natural reaction would take place, and the episode of their love be forgotten. But how base were all these calculations! What bargaining and crawling and betrayal!

"We're sordid beasts, most of us, anyway," he said to himself as he entered the house.

Sickened of the situation and of himself, and his nerves a jangle with the consideration of things so dis-

Cousin Julia

tasteful to him, an occupation he habitually avoided, he stood for a moment in the empty drawing-room. The faded yellow light seemed to him to fill the place with a sense of turgid sadness, and the languid odors of some garden roses swooning in a silver bowl on the table sharpened the impression. A feeling of weariness mingled with his annoyance. He wondered how much longer he would go on, filling his life with events instead of ideas. Events, the things one *did*, were, he felt, the eternal disillusion; in the mind alone lay the magic of life. At the same time he knew he would not live up to this belief, not at least till he was old, burned out. He snapped off the lights and was about to enter the hall, when he heard a door open and light footsteps in the passageway above. The click of high heels on the stairs followed.

It was Virginia coming down, wrapped in a swirl of rosy silk, with her feet thrust into flapping, satin mules. In her hand she held a letter. Lorme stepped back into the dark drawing-room, unwilling that she should know that he had surprised her in this attire. She had evidently come down to leave the letter where it would be mailed in the morning, and in an instant the tapping of her loose-heeled slippers and the faint rustle of her soft garments receded from him as she ascended the stairway and reëntered her room. When the door had closed he went out into the hall. There, to be sure, conspicuously placed, lay her letter. It occurred to him suddenly that of course it was the one she was sending to Tom, a vital result of their breathless, half-spoken revelations to each other out there in the starlight, revelations which it now seemed to him had taken place an immensely long time ago. And quite suddenly, he realized that, conditions being

Cousin Julia

as they were, it would be disastrous for the letter to go.

Lorme had had many and various love affairs, and it had never occurred to him to wonder whether any of them, with their accompanying subterfuges and deceptions, had or had not been dishonorable. But he had been careful, always, to keep himself guiltless of any of the lapses that are technically considered ungentlemanly. Good taste, he was fond of maintaining, was his only morality. He stood staring at the letter. He did not want it to go. If this irrevocable refusal were held back, the chances were good that it might not be sent at all. He thrust his hands into the pockets of his dinner coat and frowned. His code was the current one, with its curious hiatuses and inconsistencies, but such as it was he observed it rather rigidly. He turned abruptly and walked away, but when he had reached the foot of the stairs he went back, and taking the letter, put it into his pocket.

And later, when he reviewed the events of the evening, it occurred to him with a kind of shock that for the second time in his life he was a puppet, dancing as Mrs. Bradford pulled the strings—Mrs. Bradford!—a woman he would have considered, had he thought about her at all, a narrow, tiresome person of negligible importance.

XXXVI

THE next morning, at an unusually early hour for her to be about, Louise stepped from a motor that had drawn up at the door, and stood for a moment talking to a group of young women who had driven in with her.

"I'll be ready to start back in time for luncheon," she said in parting, smiling sweetly at them through her cloudy, blue motor veil. "Come back for me about twelve."

Answering smiles were returned through similar cloudy veils of blue or rose or white, and gloved hands were waved as the motor with a rumbling of the engine rolled away in a cloud of ill-smelling smoke. Automobiles were not then the silent, odorless miracles they have since become.

Still smiling, Louise entered the house. It was the day of the ball and she had come in to receive the quite needless ministrations of Madame de Jenks. Her hair was as glossy, her skin as clear and her nails as rosy as they would be after she had left these expert hands, but she enjoyed the process, and besides she had been, for several days, without gossip. She examined the letters which awaited her on the hall table and then, unloosening her veil as she went, she peeped into the dining room. Here she found her mother and Virginia.

"Why, girly!" exclaimed Mrs. Bradford with pleasure. "We didn't expect to see you!"

Cousin Julia

"Didn't you?" replied Louise carelessly. "I came in for Jenks. Has she come yet?"

She bent down and permitted her mother to kiss her cheek.

"I haven't seen her," replied Mrs. Bradford, taking Louise's hand in hers. "I guess she's not here yet. Sit down and have something to eat."

"For goodness' sake, Mother, why should I want to eat? I wouldn't come in without any breakfast."

Mrs. Bradford surveyed her daughter with as much affection as her severe gaze was capable of manifesting. Louise disengaged her hand.

"I'm awfully busy," she said importantly. "I forgot some of my things, and we've got to be back at the Watsons' for lunch."

"Want the car?" said her mother.

"Mercy, no! I'll go out with the girls who brought me in, of course."

She turned to leave the room, her mother's eyes following her fondly. When she reached the door Louise looked back over her shoulder, "Better come tonight, Virgie. It's going to be a perfectly *lovely* party."

Virginia only smiled in reply, with a high lifting of her eyebrow. She had been asking herself, since her sister's arrival, whether she felt in any way guilty toward her, and decided that she did not. She was going to take nothing from Louise, had taken nothing from her that had ever been hers. She, Virginia, was not to blame, no one was to blame, for this winged meeting of two souls—this love of hers and Félix's. It had taken place in a region Louise knew not of, and all that was mortal of its ecstasy would be renounced. Louise was in no way injured, for we cannot lose that which, even in our dreams, we have not possessed. In

Cousin Julia

her absorption she scarcely knew her sister had spoken to her.

Then Louise left them, and her mother, happy in this glimpse of her idol, returned to her breakfast.

The room was full of sunshine, which fell pleasantly on the luxurious service of Royal Doulton china and English silver. Mrs. Bradford, neat and business-like as usual, her pointed nose lightly powdered, and her stoutish figure incased in light gray silk, with a high collar of white net, had worn, ever since her appearance, an air of great serenity. She was not without her usual handful of letters, and selecting one, she handed it to Virginia.

"Here's a real nice letter, Virgie," she said in a pleased tone, "from Violet. Do you want to read it?"

"Why, no," her daughter replied absently, and then, fearing her indifference had seemed rude, took back her refusal. The emotional exaltation of her mood had lent her a new softness, and Louise's pert indifference to her mother's affection had impressed her more sharply than ever before, had almost hurt her. "Oh, all right," she said, "I will read it. What does she say?"

The letter was written on thick white paper in Violet's graceful, slanting hand.

DEAR COUSIN JULIA:

I've meant to write to you ever since my notes of felicitation to our lovely Virginia and the fortunate fiancé, but having nothing really to do, am fearfully busy! By nothing I do not count the incessant frivolities that are thrust upon us.

What a splendid match the dear child is making, and dearest Cousin Julia, what a brilliant success you have made of your daughters! I could contemplate children for myself if I did not know they would have large noses and go in for settlement work! Louise writes me she will

Cousin Julia

stay for the wedding, in which case she will not be home till Christmas. The old marquise misses them both, but is enchanted at having the baby all to herself, and dressing him in pink china silk to her French heart's content. She almost feels that he's hers. How fortunate it is that she and Louise get on so well!

—And now let me tell you our good news. Bob's got the transfer to London which, as you know, is a promotion as well. He will be *conseiller*. I'm delighted for myself and also for the girls. A court is always so much more amusing than the republican capitals where we've been *plantés* up to now. Tell Virginia to come to me after her *voyage de nocés* and the ambassador, who is my cousin, will present her. Louise, naturally, I hope to have with me a great deal. Of course the Lorme connections can do more for her than even I can, but I will be a safe and vigilant background.

When I think that your generosity makes the life which I love so much possible for us, I cannot find words to express my gratitude.

Virginia, who had scarcely noticed what she was reading, found her attention suddenly arrested by these words. Obviously they could mean but one thing—that the Tillinghursts were kept going, too, out of the large Bradford pocketbook. No wonder that it was flattening dangerously! No wonder that more money and more and more was constantly required! She realized more than ever how much was dependent on her marriage and for a moment she was frightened by what she had done. Yet how could she do otherwise? And, moreover, all this was not vital. She told herself that she was under no obligation to make the immense sacrifice of a loveless marriage to keep the Tillinghursts in the diplomatic service. But what of Louise and all of them, what of the moment of reckoning when she would have to tell Mrs. Bradford of the letter she

Cousin Julia

had written the night before? Her heart misgave her, and she turned hastily to the letter. Further expressions of appreciation followed and then the subject of the marriage was resumed.

—It is really wonderful. A great fortune like that means, above all else, *power*, the ultimate luxury. I wonder if Virginia half appreciates it? I have sometimes rather trembled for her, as I suspect her of both ideals and a temperament. Frightful combination! If she only realized how quickly the earth rushes up to meet one's feet and the clouds recede from about one's head when one has a good big tumble from illusion and begins to grow up! What things vanish besides youth! But she's twenty-five and she's engaged, so all is well, and I rejoice with you, you clever and fortunate woman!

The girl laid down the letter. What a trashy worldling Violet was, and how incapable of understanding beings like herself and Félix, for example. She thought of how wanting he must find her, too. And didn't any of them, she wondered, know anything about love? That was the last thing her engagement seemed to suggest to anyone. It was always the money. Why did they incessantly thrust that joyless accident into the sanctuary where the great mysteries of beauty, of passion and of sorrow watch before the enkindled heart of life which, she told herself, is love?

She returned the letter to her mother without comment, and as she took it, Mrs. Bradford's sharp eyes tried to pierce the sunset dreams that clouded the young face opposite her. She took off her nose glasses and laid them on top of her letters.

"You're very quiet this morning, daughter," she remarked. "What have you done to your hair?"

Cousin Julia

"Nothing. Does it look different?"

"Well, you look different. I thought it was your hair, but maybe not."

They left the dining room, and going out into the hall, started upstairs together. As she mounted behind her mother, the solid, neatly clad figure and upheld head spoke to Virginia rather pathetically of the other's lifetime of quiet determination, and of her stolid, merciless ambition, with herself as the chief of its slaves. It had never occurred to the girl before how much her mother must have shared the bondage she imposed. A sudden pang for the pain she would have to cause smote Virginia. She overtook Mrs. Bradford, and thrust her arm impulsively through her mother's, in its tight-fitting satin sleeve.

"Oh, my work!" exclaimed the latter. "You never look what you're doing, Virginia!" They had reached the top of the stairs and Virginia's gesture had knocked Mrs. Bradford's tatting from under her arm, and sent a handful of spools rolling in every direction. Virginia knelt to gather them up and her mother, a little breathless, sank on a seat in the hall. Just then they noticed that Louise's door was ajar, and that she and Lorme were talking. Suddenly her voice, raised as her mother and sister had never heard it, assailed them:

"But it's absurd—I don't want to go home now, and I won't, Félix!"

His reply was inaudible.

"Are you ordering me?" she said angrily.

Again he murmured an answer, and again Louise's voice rose above it and reached them clearly.

"I should like to know why, exactly why, you insist that we return to Paris at once."

Cousin Julia

The words telegram and suspicions were audible in his answer, and Louise broke in:

"Well, if you won't tell me who the cable was from or when it came, you can't expect me not to be suspicious." He spoke again, indistinctly, and then:

"Oh!" exclaimed his wife. "How dare you be insulting to me——" her voice was shrill with anger, "to me, who have endured everything from you, even your infidelities, for six years!"

"Louise!" his rebuke came to them sharply.

"Yes," she rushed on, "and I expect the cable was from Violet Tillinghurst, your latest *amour*—Oh, I know, you needn't deny it; I have plenty of proofs!"

Virginia and her mother remained as if paralyzed outside the door. At the first few words of the discussion Virginia made a grab for the spools, thinking to gather them up, and hurry away, but when the purport of Louise's recriminations became apparent, she seemed to become utterly incapable of movement or thought, and, her face drained of blood, she crouched on the floor. Meanwhile the terrible words went on. It was his voice now:

"Stop," he commanded. "I think you're mad!"

"Because I speak of it now, or because I never spoke of it before? Oh, I've known all along of all of it—of the others, and now—now Violet and her pearl necklace! Oh, oh——" her voice turned into a wail—she was crying bitterly, angrily—"I minded her more than the others. Oh, I'm unhappy, unhappy!"

Then a door slammed and muffled the sound of her crying.

Mrs. Bradford and Virginia seemed still to be stricken motionless by what they had heard. Scarcely a moment had elapsed since Virginia knelt to pick up

Cousin Julia

her mother's work, and during its passing their very breath had been suspended. Virginia had wanted to get away, to fly from these cataclysmic revelations, but instead she had only knelt there, trembling, over the foolish spools. Now, she dragged herself to her feet and without a word stumbled down the hall to her room. Mrs. Bradford's thin nose was reddened, and she stared at the wall opposite her. Her fingers that held the little handle of her eyeglasses twitched convulsively. Then she bent and picked up the three unraveled spools. Through her mind the words of her best beloved rang dully, "I am unhappy, unhappy."

XXXVII

YOU'RE late, my dear Haslip," said Frau von Ernst.

She was sitting in her garden. The flowers, blanched to a wan sameness in the fading twilight, gave tranquilly of their fragrance, and the high wall with its massed shrubbery shut out the sounds of the street and the sight of the dismal convalescents on the opposite corner. She looked badly. There was about her a certain air of discouragement and sorrow, which her tightly closed lips sought to repress, but her eyes still held their flame of dauntless enthusiasm.

"Yes," he answered, rubbing his hands together, "I am." They were clean, strong hands, and vastly expressive of his cheerful vitality. "I had to get off a sizzler to those *Medical Courier* people tonight. Posted it as I came down."

"Anything new?" she inquired abstractedly.

"No. Hammering away at my old bugbears; you know my theories."

She smiled faintly, "You're not, Haslip, getting to be a——"

"A bit of a crank?" he interrupted her, laughing. "Of course I am. However"——he pulled a chair round facing her and sat down—as usual, his strong, blond person was attired with pleasing punctilio, and his whole atmosphere was one of virile enthusiasm——"however," he repeated, crossing his legs, and slipping one hand between his knees, "I don't believe you would

Cousin Julia

have noticed I was late if we were just to discuss anti-medicine crusades. What," he smiled at her quizzically, "is it?"

"Well," she said slowly, the gravity returning to her face, "it's partly Panot."

The Doctor gave one of his youthful, explosive laughs. "No, Caroline, it couldn't be partly Panot. Not partly! With Panot it's all or nothing. He is indivisible and irrepressible."

"Nevertheless," she insisted, "the least of it is Panot."

The Doctor waited in silence for her to resume.

"He came to me today. At first he was so excited I couldn't quite make it all out."

"He would be," murmured Haslip; "the man's capacity for excitement is monumental."

"You know," she went on, "how fond he's always been of Virginia——"

"Of course. Frantically, Panotesquely!"

"Well, he's become correspondingly antagonistic to Louise. He never liked her, but now his dislike has become positively ferocious!"

The Doctor chuckled.

"Of course," she added, "he didn't say so in so many words——"

"He wouldn't have to," said the other with a broad smile. "Not he. Panot can express more kinds of hate with his nose alone than most of us can with any amount of words. I had a collie dog like that once."

Again Frau von Ernst sighed. "I would laugh, too, Haslip, if it all weren't so serious."

"I'm sorry," he said, suddenly grave. "But it may not be, whatever it is, so serious as you think. You

Cousin Julia

know, my dear friend, you always exaggerate when a certain person is concerned."

"How did you know?"

"Nothing else ever worries you," he replied simply.

"That's true. Of course I should have paid no attention to Panot if I hadn't noticed one or two things——" she paused. "He's seen a good deal of Virginia. She comes here so much, and then she talks with him, and taking one thing with another—Panot is terrifically observing—he says he believes she's being forced to marry Collingsworth so that, as he puts it, his fortune will help support Julia Bradford's favorite, Louise, in the insane luxury she demands. He says he's convinced that Virginia not only doesn't love Tom, but positively dreads him—that her face yesterday, when he was announced, was pitiful."

"But at the beginning," interrupted Haslip, "you saw them together, we both did, and we felt then that she didn't love him—well—romantically, but was perhaps content enough in the arrangement. She seemed fond of him, in a way."

"Yes, yes, I think she was fond of him, that's just the word. But the difference is that then she didn't understand any other feeling——"

"And now——" put in the Doctor brusquely.

"Now," she replied in a low voice, "now Panot is convinced that she does." There was a momentary silence. "He fears," her voice broke, and she found it difficult to go on, "now he fears, Haslip, that without knowing it perhaps, she is in love—in love with Lorme."

"Fantastic!"

"I, oh, Haslip, I'm not so sure!"

"You astonish me! Though my theory is, you know,

Cousin Julia

that it's stupid to be astonished at anything. 'Anything is possible—even this! Though, mind you, I sha'n't believe it till I have to.'

He leaned back in his chair, and stroked his mustache fiercely. In moments of tension the Doctor always had recourse to this gesture. A short silence ensued.

"Oh, Haslip—if there were to be another scandal!"

"*Another*—but there never was any."

"Not openly, no. But perhaps that would have been better. Then I could have brought her up myself. Of course," she went on, with the air of a person who has gone over the same ground many times, "it was natural that I should wish above all to shield her mother. Especially after her death I couldn't bear that the dreadful, thoughtless cruelty of gossip should have its way with her. And besides, hadn't I failed miserably? My own daughter's career ended in tragedy; how could I dare attempt to bring up someone's else?"

"Your daughter's part in it, after all, was innocent enough."

"Oh, yes, I know, but to have been dragged into such a cheap tragedy, such a ghastly melodrama! And it was my fault; I believe it was my fault."

"Rubbish, rubbish!" exclaimed the other vigorously.

"No, I can see it now. She had a beautiful youth in a way, but we brought her up in a world of unrealities."

"There are worse ways to be brought up," he observed.

"And then," she pursued steadily, "her ignorance destroyed her. But when I gave Virginia to Mrs. Bradford, I didn't remember that that experience had

Cousin Julia

taught me so much which would have enabled me to be a better mother in that case, perhaps.”

“You’re confusing causes again, Caroline. You did it because it was expedient and wise. I confirmed you in the decision then, and I still maintain it was the best one to make. And the most natural person for the child to go to was someone who knew all about her and wanted her.”

Frau von Ernst seemed not to have heard. “Un-realities!” she repeated. “After all, it’s Virginia who has been brought up on them. How has she ever been taught to understand anything that is worth while, any of the big, permanent things? As I look back on it, her life seems to me just a glacier of lifeless, artificial ideals, without a glimpse, even, of truth or simplicity. Instead of being permitted to expand wholesomely in the natural way, she has spent her life on a ladder, where she could show off to the most people, whom it was the sole object of life to impress and make envious! Nothing else. She hasn’t had a home even, only a series of more or less fashionable way-stations.”

“I know, Caroline, it sometimes seems that way, but all this purely materialistic ambition and rivalry may have something, in the long run, to do with civilization. On Julia Watts’ part, for example, it may all be a reaching—the only kind of which she is capable—but still a reaching.”

“No, no, Haslip, civilization must be a progress of the mind and the heart and the soul, not of the upholstery, as in her case.”

“But so far she hasn’t got any of those things to speak of, and at least she’s not stagnating. Her ambition,” he paused, seeking for a way to express himself, “her ambition, it’s cosmic in a way, don’t you see?”

Cousin Julia

But she was not listening. "It's incredible," she went on, "when you stop to think of what the gift of wealth, added to that of life, can offer people, that so many of them merely shut their eyes to the infinities that lie on both sides, and stumble along the narrow, beaten path behind the others, taking the dust of those in front. That's just it—living in the dust of the great highway, believing they must look, act, and live just like everyone else, cutting their souls to fit the fashionable pattern and, as in the case of Julia Bradford, straining in a perpetual, grasping rivalry."

The Doctor pushed his hair up on end above his forehead and looked as though he did not agree with her. He did not interrupt, however, and she went on:

"Then the adventure of living ends and they die in their pathway, having got a little ahead, sometimes, of some of the others, but weary, disillusioned, and thinking that that was all of life."

He made no reply and they sat for some time in silence. At last she returned to the subject from which they had strayed.

"If Louise had been born, I doubt whether Mrs. Bradford would have cared to have Virginia."

"Perhaps not, but she wasn't, and it's all over now, Caroline."

"But is it? Virginia is engaged to a man whom I'm afraid she doesn't love, and infatuated, perhaps, with her sister's husband! It's a dreadful situation, Haslip! I don't feel that I can stand aside any longer and just let things happen."

"But, rationally speaking, my dear Caroline, what could happen?"

"Oh, I don't know!"

"Let's suppose," he began argumentatively, "that

Cousin Julia

Panot is right—I remember no precedent that should lead us to believe he is—but supposing so, you can go to Lorme, he's a man of the world after all, and tell him to clear out. As for Collingsworth, if she doesn't love him, pressure of some kind is doubtless being brought to bear to make her accept him by that designing mother of hers, so go to her father. He'll see that she doesn't marry anyone she doesn't fancy, though I've a theory——”

“I think you're giving me good advice,” broke in Frau von Ernst. “Virginia's coming here tonight and I'll speak to her. I asked her to dine but she was engaged and is coming to spend the night.”

“You see,” went on Haslip, he had ceased dragging at his mustache and was now twirling the ends, “Félix is a type we both know very well—an incorrigible dilettante. An amateur of everything, of letters, of science, of love. He's quite unmoral enough to amuse himself by making her fall in love with him, vain enough to enjoy it, and human enough to be doubtless in love with her. But above all he is a worldling. He might do her harm of a certain kind, but not material harm. There would be no jumping off precipices and assuming consequences for him.”

“No, those people sometimes open the gates, but they take care to stand aside at the vital moment and let the torrent sweep by them.”

“Exactly. They jolly well avoid being swept with it. But are you sure, Caroline, that you're right about this Collingsworth business: wanting to get her away from that? You know I have a theory that a wild, mile-a-minute passion isn't the only basis for matrimony.”

She moved impatiently. “I know, I know, and I agree

Cousin Julia

with you up to a certain point. It's not necessary or even possible for most people, but Virginia isn't one of them. Don't you see that to marry without love may not be dangerous for an unattractive woman or a cold woman, because if she's unattractive she won't be tempted by anyone else, and if she's cold she won't be tempted by herself. But Virginia's neither the one nor the other."

"That's true enough," he commented briefly.

"And we've seen the working of it already. I believe if she hadn't been forced to accept Tom, she wouldn't have had this extravagant reaction in favor of Lorme."

"You're assuming that she has had it."

"I'm afraid it's true," she replied. "When I saw——"

"Hush!" he interrupted her. "Here she is now."

Virginia was coming through the garden gate. A rose-colored evening wrap hung from her bare shoulders and half hid the pale laces of her gown. Davie followed her.

"May I come in for a bit and talk with you in the garden?" he murmured.

"If you like," she replied coldly.

"You're capricious, like all beautiful women," he said reproachfully. "Your words tell me to stay but your voice says to go."

"I don't care, really, Davie, whether you go or stay," she answered listlessly.

Her reply angered him.

"Very well," he said, "then I'll go. I wonder why you came at all tonight. You didn't intend to, and you didn't enjoy it, and you've hurt me. I wish you hadn't come. Good-night."

Cousin Julia

Scarcely conscious of what he had said, she nodded a short good-night to him and made her way to the little group on the lawn. Doctor Haslip rose to greet her and she responded wearily. She sat silent while Frau von Ernst urged him to be seated again and when he refused her good-night was an indifferent murmur.

It was pleasantly quiet in the garden. The active life of the city, in growing away from Frau von Ernst's neighborhood, had mercifully taken its noises with it, and the crunching of an unfashionable buggy along the stone-pocked dirt street, or the voices and footsteps of occasional pedestrians, were the only sounds that ruptured the silence. Weary and relaxed, Virginia let the coat fall away from her shoulders.

"It's very warm," she said. Her arms lay limply along the arms of her chair, and her silent hands drooped from them like fading water lilies.

"You look tired, my child."

"I am, awfully tired. This has been a long day, Liebe Frau."

The older woman observed her anxiously. Her face was only a blur in the shadows, but her whole young body breathed a wistful disillusionment. Frau von Ernst felt sharply afraid.

"Virginia!" she exclaimed. "Are you unhappy?"

A rush of tears filled the girl's eyes, but the night hid them, and she replied merely with a shrug, so brusque and cold that her companion felt repulsed. Unwilling to intrude upon her reserve, and reluctant to force her confidence through unsolicited questioning, Frau von Ernst said no more. It was Virginia who broke the silence.

"I'm a fool!" she exclaimed.

Cousin Julia

The other forced a little laugh.

"That's not a tragedy, dear, when you know it. It's when you don't——"

"Finding it out sometimes is."

"Yes, finding it out sometimes is." The gravity of her tone outweighed the fretful sadness of Virginia's.

"Liebe Frau!" exclaimed the latter, leaning forward and closing one of her hands convulsively, "I didn't know a person could know everything and understand everything, and still be false and cruel and—and *cheap*, did you?"

"Why not? What has intellect got to do with character?"

This remark reminded her in some way of one *he* had made that day at luncheon. She was suddenly conscious of the depth of her ignorance of human beings.

"What are people made of, anyway, Liebe Frau?"

"You may well ask," sighed the other. "Of so many things. Who has ever got to the bottom of their complexities—of his own, for that matter, much less any one's else!"

She was surprised at the turn the talk had taken. Abstractions were the last thing she had expected, although she knew that in Virginia's present mood they had some poignant personal relevancy. She glanced at the girl and saw her wrapped in her own reflections, whatever they were, and indisposed to speak. So she went on, more to herself than to the other, who, she scarcely supposed, was listening.

"I've thought about that so often—about people, and it seems to me they're three very separate things—mind and temperament and character. And often it looks as if each side were at variance with the other."

Cousin Julia

She paused and then added reflectively, "I suppose I should have put character first."

"Is that so?" exclaimed Virginia, with unexpected interest. "Is that the most important?"

"I didn't think so when I was young, and foolish about cleverness and talent and all that sort of thing, but now I believe that, in the long run, it is."

Virginia moved uneasily. She was already tired of the discussion. It irked the painful rawness of her mood, and words seemed trivial anyway, compared to the profound and unhappy chaos of her being. Wounded amazement and a dreadful disillusionment, disgust of herself and of him, combined with a senseless yearning and a senseless passion for him, had driven her since morning with a thousand lashes. Having supposed him fine, she had been glad and eager to share his fineness and nobility, and to rise to imaginary heights of poetic renunciation. Now, knowing him to be earthborn and even base, a reckless belief that she could share that, too, with him at times assailed her. His allure for her was so overpowering that from this disloyal and even, she felt, monstrous love arose such a beckoning enchantment that her pulses beat to its languors and its music. She was amazed at herself and horrified, and through it all ran the ceaseless question, why—why, should this have ever happened? Why had she become involved in such a conflict of emotion? Why, if it were so wrong, had this unsolicited love visited her? She had not invited it, nor wanted it. Why, then, when it invaded and conquered her, should she be responsible and evil?

"Liebe Frau, do you ever wonder why things are?"

"My poor child, I sometimes think everything we

Cousin Julia

call living and developing is simply asking ourselves a continually increasing number of whys."

"Are they ever answered?"

Frau von Ernst paused, repeating the question to herself. She thought of all her years of questioning, of fierce self-repression, of high resolves, and of all it had come to. At last she answered:

"No."

The silence that followed seemed to her merely a superficial one. She imagined that the progress of Virginia's thoughts was so concentrated and logical that had she but a little more clearly the key, speech between them would have been unnecessary. But even as it was, she felt that she understood the general trend. She waited for a little, hoping that the girl would make some definite revelation, but as she did not, Frau von Ernst determined at last to risk another question.

"My dear," she said, "you and I have always loved each other a great deal, and now couldn't you give me just a little of your confidence? There is only one thing," she hastened to add, "that I should like to know, and that is whether you are happy, quite happy, in your coming marriage? I can't feel that you are, somehow."

"Marriage?" said Virginia vaguely. The happenings of the morning had entirely obscured that eventuality. She now recalled Tom and the fact of their engagement—that she had even imagined once that the feeling he inspired was the translation into reality of what is called love! She laughed a little, harshly, at the gigantic folly of it. And then she remembered the emotions under which the letter had been written to him breaking her engagement, and her cheeks flamed.

Cousin Julia

"Yes, your marriage. Virginia, are you sure you love him enough?"

"Love Tom, *love* him?" She stopped abruptly. A sob, stifled in her throat, choked her, and she tried to make it seem like a laugh. When she could speak again, her voice was cold. "He's nothing to me, nothing, nothing, nothing!"

"Then why, how *could* you have engaged yourself to him?"

"Because she told me I must." The reply was harsh.

"Can't you explain a little more?" said the other gently. "What do you mean?"

"Simply that we're poorer than we were, and she wants his money for her daughter and her daughter's husband." That was, she felt, the whole thing in a nutshell, and what a ghastly farce it was—that she should marry another man to maintain *his* establishment! There was a complete abandonment to reckless bitterness in her outburst.

Several things became suddenly clear to Frau von Ernst.

"Then you know?" she said simply.

"She told me—a little. Oh, Liebe Frau, did you know my mother?"

Frau von Ernst was, for the moment, staggered by the question and then, with a painful effort, she replied:

"I did, Virginia."

"Who was she; what became of her?" questioned the girl.

"She died, dear child, soon after you were born. It is a long story. Sometime, perhaps——"

She spoke hurriedly and now felt an overwhelming desire to leave the subject, to put off, for a time at least, the ultimate revelations. After so many years

Cousin Julia

of complete reserve, she could not, suddenly, lay bare the whole truth, and break with so little preparation a lifetime of silence. The mask had grown so much to be a part of her that to tear it off would leave a too sensitive surface from which she recoiled in a kind of nervous panic. She rose abruptly and laid her hand on the black waves of Virginia's thick, life-filled hair.

"Try, dear, not to think about things any more to-night," she said tenderly in a voice she struggled to control. "Come up and let Anna brush your pretty hair and see how quickly you can sleep. It grieves me almost more than I can bear to see you so sad and tired. Perhaps tomorrow we might go away together for a little while to the country."

"Oh, yes, I want to go! I want so much to go away with you. Let's go to The Pines; let's go tomorrow." And to Frau von Ernst her voice, sorrowing and bewildered, was the voice of her mother on that morning, many years before, when a bolt of withering truth had blasted her idyl.

XXXVIII

TO love deeply, violently, uncontrollably, is a talent that is not given to everyone. It would seem, in fact, that it is given to very few, although perhaps some people are thus gifted to whom fate has never offered the test in the shape of the man or woman who could inspire such a passion. But, generally speaking, more of us are attuned to mild or simply tender affections than to those of tragic vehemence. But even so, even though we have seen ourselves forever falling short of the great adventure, harboring only the love that can change and compromise and die into a solid tenderness with little private reservations, even though these modest heights only have been our attainment, how many of us have not fashioned, in some soaring moment, a creature of dreams whose eyes, whose voice and whose touch, whose spirit and whose rapture, could make us know, we fancy, love—the love of passion and abnegation, of desire and worship, a creature who never “comes true,” and whom we have soon forgotten in the duties and the superficialities of today and tomorrow?

Virginia, however, was one of the rarer creatures whose capacity for feeling does not know the ordinary bounds. The child herself of an ungovernable love, of gifted and ardent parents, such a disposition was, perhaps, inevitable. If she had never known Félix, it is possible that this tendency would have remained entirely potential. Perhaps no other person could have

Cousin Julia

so entirely awakened her. But whether just one person, or potentially many others, can evoke the same degree of feeling, it is impossible even to guess. Not the first of love's secrets has yet been told.

To her, however, came no such questionings. Lorme was to her unique, beyond all others desirable. While her reason told her he was despicable, and the conventional and moral training of her whole lifetime forbade her even to think of him, he remained the man whom the whole of her, all that was strong, all that was subtle, all that was elemental and all that was evolved, demanded and yearned for.

She lay in her dark, hot room that night when Frau von Ernst had left her, unable to sleep, going over and over, as she had done all day, the events of the past twenty-four hours. Now it was his voice murmuring to her in the dim radiance of the white moon, "How lovely you are lying there—the night is already in your hair—ah, Virginie!" How her heart repeated its throbbing at the memory of her name spoken with that voice of desire, whose tones carried the thrill of a caress. And then it was Louise, and the searing memory of her terrible revelations.

It did not occur to Virginia to doubt them. Her sister was not an imaginative person. She went in for facts and when she made a statement it was probable, horribly probable, that it was the skeleton, at least, of the truth. Moreover, there had been no denial. His exclamation had been one of annoyance and anger, presumably at the bad taste of her outburst, nothing more. Virginia intuitively recognized the truth of the accusations and accepted it, although it left her appalled and desolate, weeping for illusions that had been her justification and her apology, and whose going, she felt,

Cousin Julia

swept away with them her innocence and her youth.

The first definite sensation she experienced that morning when she left her mother sitting outside Louise's door, and made her way, dazed and trembling, to her own room, had been one of utter revulsion. She believed that she loathed Lorme, could never again feel for him anything but detestation. He was, it seemed, a vulgar flirt, a light of love, a trashy pretender, whose pastime it was to make pretty speeches, and worse—yes, far worse, an insatiable sensualist! The thought that she had allowed herself to care and, worse than that, to let him know that she cared, wrung from her a groan of humiliation and remorse.

When her own thoughts became unbearable, she had decided to ride, and had also telephoned to Davie that she would go to the Watsons' ball with him that evening—anything rather than remain inactive, a prey to her shame and her memories.

Then, out on the empty country road that stretched away before her with its suggestion of mystery, deserted, narrowing to a thin streak between the hills, and with the first hint of autumn's romance in the yellowing sunshine and shorn fields, then inevitably a certain reaction came. The feeling for Lorme that had been months developing could not be destroyed in an hour and by a few words. In spite of herself the charm of his personality returned to her. After all it was not his morality or his immorality she had fallen in love with; it was nothing that could be said for or against him. It was his face, his person, his way of thinking and being, or, rather, the essence of all these and something more, the very thing, subtle and illusive as it is, that, as they had once said, makes you, you, and me, me. And the memory of it was

Cousin Julia

to her seductive and compelling, and obliterated the rest.

What if he had played with love! That was perhaps only the result of boredom, of curiosity, of cynicism. This time, she told herself, it had not been play. Never could Violet Tillinghurst or "the others," as Louise had mysteriously called them, have evoked from him the passion and the tenderness she had heard in his voice last night. It was impossible. The weeks they had spent together had proved how entirely they were made for each other, had revealed the strange depths of their sympathy and utter understanding. But with this new mood came a raking jealousy, the first she had ever known—jealousy of Violet and of "the others," those unknowable other women who had loved him and received his faithless homage. He must have spoken to them of love, have bent over them in breath-taking deference, have touched their hands—kissed them! Oh, it was horrible! He was false, cheap, a traitor to Louise (as she, Virginia, had been)—to himself and to her!

And so it went. Back and forth she bent to the changing wind of her emotion, remorseful, disillusioned, passionate, and tortured by the new pain of jealousy—a bitter jealousy for those imagined kisses of the past. All during the day, and amid the intolerable gayety of the evening, and now, through the long night, these thoughts pursued her, until at last, from very weariness, she fell asleep. Tom, she did not even think of, and the wisp of information she had received from Frau von Ernst concerning herself was lost in the obsession of the moment.

XXXIX

MR. BRADFORD, at various times, had done business for Frau von Ernst, so that when she went to his office the following morning she had no difficulty in being admitted.

"He is very busy," said the stenographer, "getting ready to go away. But," she added pleasantly, "of course he'll see you."

Frau von Ernst smiled and seated herself by an open window. The smile, however, did not linger. The look of anxiety, mingled with a deeper sadness of reminiscence, that she had worn since the day before, returned, and with a slight sigh she leaned back to await the summons to Mr. Bradford. Him she had come, during the many years of their acquaintance, increasingly to like. Her actual knowledge of him was small, and, strangely enough, it was only through her infrequent visits to him here at his office, where they met in a purely business relationship, that she felt she had come to know him at all. Today they were to talk of personal matters for the first time, but she felt no uneasiness and no shrinking. She believed that whatever she said or failed to say, he would understand. And when, a few moments later, she looked up into his gaunt face with its sunken, kindly eyes, she was more than ever convinced that it was true.

Mr. Bradford's offices were on the top floor of the highest building Columbia at that time possessed. His private room was a small, bare place, meagerly fur-

Cousin Julia

nished with an old-fashioned, roll-top desk of ugly yellow wood, and two or three chairs. A picture Virginia had once given him for Christmas when she was a child, of a very wintry winter scene, with a lemon-colored sun lurking behind the farmhouse, and pink reflections on the snow, hung, stained and smoke-begrimed, on the wall, and the wide windows framed an industrial panorama of Columbia. J. C. in his office was a subtly, inconceivably different person from J. C. in his home. Just wherein the difference lay she had often asked herself, and had always been unable quite to say. Here he seemed straighter and younger, and full of power and tranquillity. Almost every person has a reserve of force that becomes visible and magnetic when he is engaged in the work, whatever it is, that he does supremely well.

"I'm glad to see you, ma'am," he said genially, taking her outstretched hand. "How are you?"

There was nothing *gauche* in his use of the word "ma'am." With him it was a very sincere token of respect, and he used it only to the few women who held his highest regard. Frau von Ernst was one of them.

"I am quite well, thank you." "How are you?"

He placed a chair for her.

"I have not come to talk business today, Mr. Bradford, but I hope I shan't take too much of your time——" She smiled at him inquiringly.

He sat down in his swivel chair, and taking off his spectacles, folded them up and placed them in their case which he laid on his desk. He then crossed his thin hands and looked at her expectantly.

"You're not too busy to give me half an hour?" she went on. "They told me you were going away."

He smiled at her with great cordiality.

Cousin Julia

"I'm not going till two o'clock, ma'am. The whole morning is at your disposal," he said gallantly.

He liked Frau von Ernst. She was so gentle and quiet, and her voice had a soft quality that he found restful and agreeable to listen to.

"Mr. Bradford," she began, "do you——" She paused. She had been about to say, "Do you feel that you know Virginia well?" It was an impulsive beginning and before it was said it struck her that such a personal question might seem impertinent. But having stopped midway, she found it difficult to make another opening, and after a moment's hesitation heard herself suddenly completing the question.

"Do you feel that you know Virginia very well?"

He was surprised. The idea was new to him. It had never occurred to him to question whether he did or did not, but he had always assumed that of course he did know all the members of his family well—everyone knew his own family. The fact, however, that the idea was a novel one caused him to consider it carefully. It was his habit. She watched him anxiously, wondering what he would say. At last he spoke:

"I never thought much about that," he replied. "I guess I always supposed I did." There was a pause, and then, "I've been pretty busy the last few years," he added, running his hand through his fine, gray hair. "Maybe she's grown out of my knowledge some."

A short silence followed, broken finally by Frau von Ernst again saying something she had not in the least intended to.

"Mr. Bradford, I'm going to repeat to you exactly what Virginia said to me last night, and then you'll realize why I've come to you. I asked her if she was happy in her coming marriage, and if she loved Tom,

Cousin Julia

and she replied, 'Love Tom'—and then she laughed and it wasn't a happy laugh—'why, he's nothing to me, nothing, nothing, *nothing*.'

Mr. Bradford sat very still, but a look of surprised distress swept over his face. He uttered a low whistle.

"She's so unhappy, so unhappy," she went on hurriedly, "that I felt you ought to know."

"But her mother ought to be told of this," he exclaimed.

She turned her face partly away and looked out of the window. "I told her once that I suspected it, but she said that love didn't matter."

Frau von Ernst was afraid, as she made this avowal, which seemed like a criticism of his wife, that Mr. Bradford would resent it. She had divined the intense loyalty of his nature.

"She probably didn't understand," he said at length. "I suppose she meant a certain kind of love."

The other nodded. It was difficult to go on, but she had determined that J. C. should know at least a part of the truth.

"I myself didn't realize the extent of Virginia's feeling till last night," she went on. "And then there was very little said, but I gathered," she was proceeding cautiously, feeling her way, "that she had been—been persuaded to accept him. He's such a fine young man, it's quite natural Mrs. Bradford should wish her to marry him, and of course it's an advantageous match in every way."

"Frau von Ernst," said J. C. seriously, "let's speak out plain about this. Tell me exactly what you know or think and I," he added loyally, "can tell whether I think you're mistaken or not."

"Maybe it's better not to go into things at all," she

Cousin Julia

replied after a moment. "It isn't necessary if you'll only go to young Collingsworth and break the engagement for her."

"No," he said emphatically, "don't you see I couldn't do that without knowing more about it? That is Mrs. Bradford's affair more than mine."

"Well," she answered with sudden recklessness, "I know that Virginia abhors the idea of this marriage, but that she feels that it is her duty to go on with it, that she has been told that it is. Mrs. Bradford loves Virginia and desires the best for her just as you and I do, I have no doubt, but she doesn't know her as well as I, and I fancy you know her. She asked Virginia to marry him for the sake of many things—perhaps the advantage his money would be to the family among them——"

A half-stifled ejaculation broke from Mr. Bradford, but she went right on:

"Virginia consented, and I know now that she regrets it, more than ever of late."

His eyes were on her keenly.

"More than ever of late?" he repeated interrogatively.

"Yes." She paused to reflect. This was delicate ground. She did not want to say too much, and yet she wanted him, at least partially, to understand. At length she resumed in as casual a manner as possible:

"Virgie has seen too much lately of Louise's husband. The contrast has been unfortunate. He is so much more her type than the other. And the very fact that she felt herself bound to Tom may have intensified her distaste for him—her admiration for Felix."

At last it was all said, although she had touched

Cousin Julia

upon things as evasively as possible, and she hoped that Mr. Bradford would not go further into this part of the subject. It was extremely painful to her and must be, she felt, to him. But his tact was not at fault. He evaded that issue and merely said:

"You are sure of all this—sure that Virginia wants to be released?"

Frau von Ernst was deeply relieved, glad that he chose, also, to ignore the part she had vaguely implied Mrs. Bradford had played in the engagement, and she felt that she could risk another revelation. "Absolutely. I know she accepted him from a mistaken sense of duty, with an idea of repaying her obligation to you all."

There was another uneasy pause. She did not know what he would make of that implication and sought to end the discussion by summing it all up in this plea:

"Put an end to all this, Mr. Bradford!"

"I will. I'm leaving today and I'll see Collingsworth in a week or two."

She rose. "I hope I have not been presumptuous. I came here in no spirit of criticism. I have nothing in my heart but gratitude to you and yours——" If she was a trifle insincere just here it was unconsciously so, for, having revealed as clearly as she dared what Mrs. Bradford had done, her resentment toward the latter had vanished. "For what you've all done for Virginia. Any seeming unkindness you must forgive me."

"I thank you instead, Frau von Ernst."

They shook hands. Then in a new tone she observed, "I would like to take Virginia to the country for a few days, Mr. Bradford. Can we have The Pines?"

Cousin Julia

"Of course, of course. My secretary will make all the arrangements. Stay as long as you like."

"Only a week or so," she said.

"What train will you take?"

"The 8.05 tonight, I think."

"All right; they'll be there to meet you in the morning."

She met his gaze directly and they exchanged a look of complete understanding. Just how much he had divined of all that she had hinted at, of all that she had left unsaid, she would never know, but the fact that he had asked so few questions led her to believe that he had surmised a great deal. She wondered what he thought of it all, what he had thought all these years, of his wife, of their life and his own hard-working, illy rewarded part in it. She knew Julia Bradford's ambitions were not his, and she believed him to possess a nobility and a delicacy which must be forever alien to such strivings. Yet he loved her, unquestionably, was unquestionably loyal to her. She suddenly felt that his life must be a lonely one. Her heart went out to him, and holding out her hand again, she said impulsively:

"You are a good man, Mr. Bradford. I wish there were more people just like you in the world."

Then, a little ashamed of her outburst, she turned quickly and left the room.

XL

WHEN Jim Bradford was a young man just out of college—a state university through which he had worked his way—he came to Columbia with his younger brother and established the law firm of Bradford and Bradford. For them, as for most farm-bred boys, the city held an irresistible promise of success and fortune, but like most of their kind, the country was always in their blood. And so, for their few and hard-earned vacations, Jim Bradford and his brother always returned to it, hungry for the clean, calm friendliness of the woods and lakes, for the sight of red barns and golden stubble fields—dear to them because of the potent, half-unconscious charm of childhood associations.

At some time during each of the long, busy years that preceded J. C.'s marriage to Julia Watts, the brothers contrived to escape with fishing rods or shot-guns to the wooded wildernesses to the north of them and spend a few days in blissful solitude, with the smell of a camp fire in their nostrils, the silence of blue lakes and the rustling of pines caressing their ears. And one year, when they were shooting in northern Wisconsin, they committed their first extravagance.

Their guide, a young half-breed of French and Chippewa extraction, brought it about, for it was from him that they bought The Pines. He owned a few hundred acres of woodland and lake shore in an entirely virgin and unsettled locality. Part of this he

Cousin Julia

desired to sell on the condition that he be kept on as caretaker. He lived on the place in a little shack just big enough for him and his young wife and was willing to build a log cabin for the new owners.

The Bradfords reached the place just at sundown and as they paddled across the silent, tranquil lake, startled deer, which had come down to the water's edge to drink, vanished at their approach into the cathedral twilight of the great pines that crowded each other to the shores. Fifteen miles away they had left the railroad and had driven over a murderous corduroy road roughly laid through the forest. Then an hour's paddling—they left the wagon to go round by the longer shore road—remained before they reached the homestead. The beauty, the remoteness, the solitude, of the place entirely captivated Jim Bradford.

"I guess we'll have to have this, Ed," was all he said, and the other acquiesced delightedly.

So The Pines was acquired, and several years later when the younger brother died, he left his part in it to J. C. There were two hundred and fifty acres of land, the caretaker, Louis' place and the log house for themselves that each year saw some slight addition and improvement. J. C. loved the place and who knows what plans he cherished for its future? Perhaps he saw it, half farm, half country place, with cleared places here and there on sunny hillsides for pastures or grain fields—enough to feed the Jersey cows and pigs and horses; with truck gardens and all the rest, where you could sit down, your family about you, at a table spread with the fruits of your own soil, the center of a little kingdom that existed for you and because of you, that fed you and ministered to you far from a wearying world of which you had no need as long as

Cousin Julia

the summer breezes ruffled the lake or the painted cheeks of Indian summer flaunted their false promise that summer would never die.

Then he married Julia Watts. They visited the place once alone together, and again, when the children were young, even spent a summer there, but that was about all. Embryo kingdoms in deer-haunted solitudes had nothing whatever to do with Julia Bradford's plans, and she found little time to give to them. Moreover, she didn't like the place. The silence got on her nerves; she found the woods spooky, the lake treacherous. There was no church to go to on Sundays, no social column to keep an eye on, no telephone. So nothing further was done to The Pines. It was comfortable enough for the occasional week-end visits from the family during the years the girls were growing up, and more than comfortable enough for the more frequent occasions when J. C. went up there alone.

From time to time, whenever he found it possible to snatch a few days from business, he would slip onto a train at night and find Louis waiting with a buckboard in the keen, early morning air, to drive him to his beloved retreat. As the years went by he no longer hunted and fished, but amused himself instead with bucksaws and hammers and nails instead of a gun or a rod. Then, at ease in his soft flannel shirt, he built and mended fences and docks and chicken coops and sawed dead limbs from the tall trees about the house, or sat long hours with his pipe, looking out over the water, watching the fish leap up into the sunshine, and the swift, sleek heads of the muskrats and beaver cutting a smooth, ever-widening trail through the placid lake.

He loved the early supper cooked by Mrs. Louis,

Cousin Julia

with its pervasive flavor of salt pork and boiled coffee, the soundless nights that wrapped him in a silence as profound as was the darkness after the moon slipped into the lake, and more than all the early morning, when the odor of more salt pork and more boiled coffee stole out to mingle with the heavenly freshness of the unpolluted air, sweet with the breath of dew-washed pines.

There were times, after Virginia came home from school, when she accompanied him, just these two together, and those were indeed golden occasions. They tramped the woods together, Virginia, thrilled with the novelty of the outing, as fresh as the tall pink lilies that grew in the meadow brook. Everything interested, enchanted her—the fine, rare flowers they came upon unexpectedly in the thickets, the sight of a deer flying through the open, the audacity of the chattering squirrels, or the gross face and slow progress of a porcupine, lumbering over fallen trees and tangled underbrush.

In the evenings they sat out in front, not long, as they were both too sleepy, but for a while, and then they sang things together or listened to Louis' alleged experiences and tales of the forest when the snow reached up to the eaves of his log hut and the booming of the frozen lake sang out like a cannon through the winter night.

She thought of those times now and her heart ached. Then life had seemed as clear as the morning air and as pure, as gay as the jeweled wavelets that rippled and raced on the sunlit surface of the lake. But now what a dark and passion-laden thing it had become, and with what a murk of unworthy emotions it had clouded her!

Cousin Julia

She and Frau von Ernst left Columbia the night of the latter's interview with J. C., and found that all preparations had been made to receive them. The morning of their arrival was damp and cold and there was now the feel of autumn in the air as if at last the long-drawn-out summer were at an end. It had been raining and the dripping trees tossed their wet branches restlessly under a lowering sky. Louis assured them cheerfully that the sun would be out before they reached The Pines, but Virginia, who loved the fall, was glad of a respite from the eternal sunshine and heat of an unusual summer that had lingered so long into September. She was silent during the drive over, but Louis' loquacity more than made up for it. He had never seen Frau von Ernst before, and was immensely stimulated by the prospect of a new audience.

Virginia's adieux to the Lormes the day before had been of the shortest and Félix was at a loss to account for her manner or her abrupt departure. They would be gone before she returned and this was the final good-by. But by no look or word did she betray a memory of what had occurred between them the night before, or even of the many weeks of pleasant intimacy they had spent together. Her icy formality angered as well as surprised him and he responded haughtily and in the same tone. So they parted. The memory of that parting had tortured her ever since, and she regretted the strength of character that had enabled her to go through with it, as she had never regretted an act of *ill-doing* in her life. Why had she not granted just one moment of abandon to her love before it was all over and the dreary future was upon her? A last look, a few last words of passionate tenderness to remember, a touch, even—even a kiss, since that was to

Cousin Julia

be the end? But no, she had seen fit to summon all her pride, all her righteousness and fare forth to battle with herself without the memory of one moment of warm, human yielding to sustain her. Some day, she told herself, she would be glad of that perhaps, glad that where Violet was unspeakably base she had been fine, if it was only at the last. But it was desolate and cold, the region she now trod alone.

It rained intermittently during the day, which seemed an interminable one to Virginia, and the lake was lost in a gray veil of falling water. For the first time in her life she felt at a loss with Frau von Ernst, and uncomfortable. There were so many things unsaid between them, and although the older woman in no way betrayed a consciousness of them, they seemed to Virginia to obstruct all freedom of intercourse. She could not put away from her her awareness of them, nor could she force down the barriers of her reserve and give to the other her full confidence. And, as the days passed with this curious constraint lying heavy upon them, there were times when Virginia wished that Frau von Ernst knew everything, but it was impossible for her to tell. Sometimes she was too ashamed, at other times too confused in her emotions, at others too sad. To speak of it was to weep and she was too proud to have the other see her tears shed in such a cause.

Notwithstanding the soft, persistent downpour, Virginia spent hours tramping through the woods. She liked to hear the light patter of the rain on the foliage and the voiceless murmur of the pines. It soothed her, softened somehow and lent indistinctness to the sharp outlines of her recent experiences. She was trying to drive them from her mind, or if not that, to crush them down below the level of her active consciousness. Mean-

Cousin Julia

while, letters from Tom continued to arrive. She hoped each day to see the last of them or the one—and she dreaded its contents—which would tell her he had learned of his dismissal. Having had at last a light cut of the whip destiny wields with such amazing freedom, the gift of sympathy for suffering had been given her, and she saw now and hated the sorrow she was causing him. But it had to be. She felt that to regain peace and be able to go on again, she must cut herself quite free from all that had gone before, and above all, do away with subterfuge and unreality. Her engagement had been a perpetual deception; from now on she would walk upright, true to herself—in the narrow way of truth itself when she had learned to know it. The fresh, sharp air painted her cheeks and lips with keener beauties and her gray, dark eyes deepened with a look that smote Frau von Ernst to the heart.

It is not [she wrote Haslip] the sadness of it, but the depth. My little girl has simply grown up. I think she has learned, in what way I don't yet know, how life can turn and send its arrows into every one of us, and that as you can feel so you must pay. I feel very sorry, Haslip, for human beings, the way they all seem to tumble through life, tormented by it, hurting one another, each one with his secret scars where disappointment or wounded pride or smitten hopes have burned into the quick! Do you suppose there is anyone who has escaped these scars? I don't believe so. I don't believe there is anyone who at some time, for some cause great or woefully petty, hasn't looked out into life with the look she wears now. Perhaps such a person would be to be pitied, for understanding is most surely born of pain.

BAD weather is, of course, not eternal, and at last the sun stepped forth and brought with him all the enchanted beauty of a perfect autumn day. The first of these gilded mornings found Virginia sitting alone on the small veranda before the house. Louis had just returned from across the lake with the accumulation of two days' mail in his pocket. Among the letters Virginia found several from Tom. She opened them nervously, in search of the one she feared and yet desired to have, but did not find it. There could no longer be any doubt; he had not received the letter she had left for him that unforgettable night on the hall table in Highland Road. She wondered vaguely what had become of it, but was engrossed in the necessity she now recognized of writing another. She decided to do so at once. So she rose and, going into her room, seated herself before the rough table that served her as a desk.

But she found the letter difficult of achievement. Several times the ink dried on her pen while the sheet of paper before her remained untouched. She felt that the first letter to him had been cruelly abrupt and realized how little she had been concerned with him when she wrote it. She desired now to write at greater length and yet—would mere superfluous words make it easier for him to bear? She knew they would not. Besides, what could she say? Would it not be indelicate, almost insulting, to cloak her action with fine words of

Cousin Julia

futile regret? There was a certain thing she must tell him and perhaps, after all, to tell him briefly was the kinder way. At last she accomplished a letter as simply direct, though from far different reasons, as the previous one had been. But the effort brought back all the aching conflict of the past week and an overwhelming heartache and loneliness overcame her. Her head sank forward on her arms, and for a long time, with her wet cheek pressed against the deal top of the table, she cried silently. The tears helped her and at last she got up and bathed her face in cold water. As she did so a new idea, unheralded, took possession of her.

It obsessed her all day, and she could scarcely wait till evening, which, she decided, was the best time to put it into execution. In triumphant serenity the golden day passed, leaving her thrilled by its beauty, wondering again at the riddle of it.

Why should there be beauty, why should we respond to it? She remembered the moment when she had thought that question solved, when she believed the perception of beauty to be a part of the mysterious fact of love, a forewarning of that greater beauty and its consummation. But now she felt that she no longer believed in love. She recognized, to her sorrow, a cruel enchantment of the senses, a senseless thing that was not cosmic, not sacred, but a bewildering accident that could bitterly wound. No, the ideal she had absurdly fashioned was rubbish, but the poem of perfumed air, of sunlight lying cool and golden on the plummy summits of tall pine trees and sending a sudden shaft into the haunted depths below to touch the fern leaves to a glowing radiance of living green, of blue lake and bluer sky, of marching white clouds, of the swift flight of

Cousin Julia

wild ducks racing before the north wind—in a word, the eternal wonder of beauty—was with her yet. Why, why, why? What is the faint, high hope, elusive as a homing bird lost in the fading glory of the evening sky, that it holds out to us?

After their early supper was at an end, Virginia slipped into her wool jersey and gloves and went out to bring in wood for the fireplace. Louis she had sent to post her letter on the evening train and he would not be back till late.

"I'll bring lots, so we can have a great, big fire to-night, Liebe Frau," she said, bending over and brushing the older woman's cheek with her lips.

"That will be nice, only don't strain your back, dear," said the other, watching her affectionately. "Get Marie to help."

But the girl was already outside and had slammed the door back of her. It was a black night, and the vast, dark sky was jeweled with stars. They seemed to hang close to the earth, barely out of reach, and one great, shining thing glittered just above a giant Norway pine like a star of Bethlehem on top of a Christmas tree. The wind had risen. When she came in with the last armful of split logs her cheeks were glowing with the cold and exertion. To Frau von Ernst she seemed brighter, more like herself than she had for some time, and as though she had at last been able to find an interest outside her own brooding thoughts. The older woman wondered to whom the letter she had sent to the train was addressed.

Virginia knelt and tended the fire and then, throwing off her cap and jersey, she sat on a low chair before the chimney place watching the flames. The supper things had been removed and on a table in the farther

Cousin Julia

corner of the living room a shaded lamp burned. Its soft glow and the red, uncertain firelight fell warmly on the rough-hewn logs that rose to a peak in the center of the room, there being no second story to the house. Frau von Ernst was sitting at the table knitting.

"I don't see why we never came up here together before, Virginia," she said at last. She was deeply sensible of the beauty of the place, and tonight the warmth and brightness of the room, heightened by its atmosphere of romantic isolation, had an unusual charm. "Why haven't you ever brought me before?"

"Because I've never been in the habit of doing anything that was in the least worth while, or that I really enjoyed, I suppose," she answered.

"Then it's high time you began, child," replied the other lightly.

"I intend to." The answer was gravely made.

There was a moment of silence.

"Come over here and let's talk, Liebe Frau," the girl said suddenly.

Frau von Ernst made no comment. She laid down her knitting, and crossing the room, seated herself in a large chair near Virginia. So they were to talk at last! She wondered, almost dreaded, what was coming, and yet felt a deep relief that their long silence was to be broken.

"Liebe Frau, I want you to tell me," Virginia spoke steadily, deliberately, "all you know about myself."

The older woman had expected confidences rather than this question, still she had felt sure that it would come sometime, and had fortified herself to meet it.

"It—it's not such a very long story," she said at last, "but it is very hard for me to tell. It's right,

Cousin Julia

however, that you should know, and I'll do the best I can."

Virginia slipped her hand into Frau von Ernst's and waited for her to proceed.

"You see, Virginia, your—your mother was my daughter."

"Oh, oh!" The exclamation from Virginia, scarcely more than a tense murmur, rose from the very depths of her being, and escaped her lips in profound astonishment. Such a possibility had never before occurred to her. She turned and looked up at Frau von Ernst, straining at realization, and for a long moment their eyes held each other's, then, throwing her arms round her friend's neck, she exclaimed over and over again, "I'm so glad, so glad!"

Frau von Ernst's eyes filled with tears and she held Virginia's face pressed close to hers. She released her at last and the girl drew her chair close beside the other, and cradled her head on Frau von Ernst's shoulder. When the latter had stopped the tears that had overflowed at this long-deferred moment of recognition, she went on, although it was hard, as she had said, even harder than she had imagined it would be.

"She died when she was nineteen, when you were a few months old."

"But why didn't I stay with you—why——"

"Hush, dear, please. You will see if you will only be patient."

"I will, Liebe Frau—forgive me. I shan't interrupt again."

Presently the other resumed,

"Your father was an artist, a—a musician. His parents came to this country when he was very young, to Boston. They both died early in his life, and I think

Cousin Julia

he did mostly everything for himself. He was practically self-taught, but he was very talented and when he was twenty or twenty-one he went to Chicago, where he found work—work with the symphony orchestra, I believe. Your mother must have been only a child of eleven or twelve at that time. She was being taught at home, as I couldn't bear to have her go out to school. We had tutors and governesses for her and I taught her music. At last, however, when she was seventeen my husband felt that she must go away to school, so we sent her to Boston. She went to a day school and stayed with the von Behrings, some cousins of hers who were living there at the time.

"They were very musical people, and their house was a center of all that was best of the artistic and literary element of Boston. Meanwhile your father, after years of poverty and obscurity in Chicago, had come back to Boston to live. He had grown musically and had written several things that were favorably noticed. He got a position with a Boston orchestra and was working on a symphony of his own which was to be played by them."

There was an interval of silence and then,

"My daughter," she went on in a low voice, "met him at the von Behrings'. He used to play there evenings and they said his music was remarkably beautiful. He would easily have been concert *Meister*, it was said, but for his unreliability. He hated work or was, perhaps, so absorbed in his writing that he could not be counted on in a position of responsibility. Well, his music, his personality, everything, made a—a fatal impression on your mother. She came home that first summer full, I suppose, of memories of him which she kept to herself; and when she returned to Boston the following winter,

Cousin Julia

her feeling developed into love, an overwhelming, foolish, terrible sort of love. I hope you will never care that way, Virginia; I don't believe life has any place for such love as that; it only brings suffering and tragedy."

Virginia leaned forward in her chair and looked steadily into the fire. The story carried a foreboding of disaster. Some ghost of a long-dead pain seemed to beat its soundless wings in the still room. Presently the other spoke again,

"Then, Virginia, one morning—one spring morning, I remember how my yellow tulips had opened that very day, and I was looking at them, had bent over to pick one of them to send to her—they gave me the telegram."

Virginia, nervously excited by the story, baldly, hurriedly told as it was, and by her imagined prescience of calamity, waited breathless for it to go on, but the silence was so long that at last she said gently,

"Yes, Liebe Frau, the telegram?"

"'By the time this reaches you,' it said, 'Edouard and I will be married. Forgive us. I love you more than ever.' That was all. The words were quite meaningless to me at first. I couldn't grasp them, much less believe them. And then, slowly, I began to realize—slowly because I didn't *want* to realize or believe. She was still just a child to me, and the fact, when it became real to me, that she was married and could have found it in her heart to do it that way, completely overwhelmed me. We had always been so near to each other that I could only believe there must have been some reason, some terrible reason, for it all. I became panic-stricken. My husband wasn't in town just then, so I sent for Dr. Haslip to come. I told him what had happened and when I had finished I saw that he was more

Cousin Julia

disturbed even than I had expected he would be. He seemed to hesitate at first, but at last he said,

“I know it doesn't seem possible, but, Caroline, I believe this man is already married!”

Virginia turned sharply, her startled eyes full on Frau von Ernst's face.

“He told me,” the latter went on, speaking quickly in a low, strained voice—all through the recital her pride fought bitterly to restrain the tears these memories evoked, and her throat ached with the struggle—“that there had been a family here called Watts. They had been patients of his until seven or eight years before, when they had moved to Chicago—all but one sister, a Mrs. Bradford. ‘Why, I remember,’ he said, ‘I remember as well as if it were yesterday, because it amused me, that Mrs. Bradford came into my office one morning and said that they'd had two misfortunes—their father had died and her sister Lucy had married a foreigner—a musician. She told me his name with such chagrin that I've never forgotten it.’ It was, of course, the same name, and the fact that he was also a musician and had been at that time in Chicago made it difficult to doubt that it was the same man. Then Mrs. Bradford's sister must be dead, I exclaimed, but Haslip seemed to think he would have heard if she were. My anxiety was now so terrible that I could neither think nor act, so I begged Haslip to decide what was best to be done. He concluded that I should get ready to go East that night and find them. He would see Mrs. Bradford in the meantime and learn what he could of her sister. What he discovered was so serious that he decided to go with me. Mrs. Bradford had told him that her sister was living in Chicago, separated from her husband, but not divorced.”

Cousin Julia

Frau von Ernst ceased speaking and for an interval there was no sound but the flowing murmur of the wind through the pines. At last she commanded herself enough to resume,

"I have never been able to understand how he could have been mad enough to do it. He had tried, it appeared, to induce his wife to divorce him, but she refused to do so. He had also, at one time, begun divorce proceedings against her. Nothing had come of that, but he seemed to have, in some way, grown to feel that they were really divorced. He had not seen her for years. She had gone so completely from his life that it was as though he felt that he had, by sheer effort of will, banished her from it practically, as well as spiritually and physically.

"It was not till almost a week later that I could find them. They had left Boston the morning I received the telegram, and had had a ceremony of some kind performed in a little town in Connecticut, and they expected, it seemed, to sail for Europe the following week. He was going to London to conduct his symphony which was to be played there. Oh, Virginia," she reached for the girl's hand and held it clasped in hers, "God keep you from ever suffering as I did when I had to tell my child the truth about him!" At last the tears came and streamed down her cheeks. "She never *loved* him less, but she could never forgive him. She was a creature capable of the most passionate tenderness, still she was young and pure, and even a little hard—the hardness of that very youth and purity. She could see no palliation whatever, no possible condonement of his sin. Like her father, she was a devout Catholic, so there could be no question in her mind of a divorce from his wife being arranged and subsequently a marriage

Cousin Julia

with herself. She simply felt that everything was at an end, that there was no happiness, or honor, or hope, left in life for her.

"Her father joined us in New York and we went abroad at once. There is nothing much I can tell you of the months of heartache and despair that followed for her and for all of us. Then, in Florence, you were born, and after that she wanted to come home. She was not strong and the symptoms of the disease of which she died later were already developing. We left Florence scarcely knowing where we were going or what we intended to do. Our hearts were so rent with grief that we seemed incapable of practical thought of any kind. I could not endure the thought of returning to Columbia, where a part of the truth, at least, would be suspected, but my poor child longed to return to America. Perhaps, though she never mentioned him, and would, I knew, never see him again, she yearned to be at least on the same soil as the man she had adored, and from whom she had been torn in the first—the first ravishment of their love. But before we could sail she had grown too ill to travel and a month later she died."

Virginia pressed the hand that still held hers in mute sympathy. She herself felt no particular sadness, only a keen interest and excitement at her part in this romantic story.

"So we came back to America without her. I was completely crushed, but I realized, even in my bewilderment and sorrow, that we could not go back to Columbia without some explanation of my daughter's death and of you. I was determined that at any cost her memory should not be submitted to the unspeakable vulgarity and cruelty of gossip. In New York we found, to our surprise, Mrs. Bradford awaiting us.

Cousin Julia

She'd learned of all that had happened from Haslip, who had felt that she was to be trusted, and she had decided, in her practical way, that we would not dare to return to Columbia with you, and, having no children of her own, had conceived the astonishing idea of adopting you. She laid all this before us very simply and suggested that we take some time to think it over.

"I had never known Mrs. Bradford, but during the few days we spent at the hotel together, I was very favorably impressed. Her—how shall I put it—her cool serenity seemed to me at that time an evidence of the most delicate tact. I was so hurt and crushed and with it all so sensitive that demonstrativeness of any kind would have been unendurable to me." Virginia nodded understandingly. The other continued, "I found her restful, wonderfully sensible and full of a kind of strength on which I felt I could rely. I think it was that suggestion in her of force, reserved but tremendous, which finally decided me. In the face of her shrewdness, her calm determination, I felt myself to be merely a vacillating and emotional weakling, incapable—*how* incapable—of bringing up a child."

Frau von Ernst stopped abruptly, worn out by the effort she had made. "You know the rest," she said wearily. Her face was drawn and pale and she appeared, for the first time, old to Virginia. The habitual look of pride, of restrained intensity, was gone. In this unique moment of relaxation, of abandonment to her memories, new lines appeared in her face; her lips sagged with an expression of impotent sadness. She seemed conscious of it suddenly, but lacked the strength to regain at once her self-control. She rose.

"I—I think I'll leave you now, dear. Good-night, my little Virginia."

Cousin Julia

The girl flung herself into her arms and they held each other close. Then Virginia lighted a candle and took it into Frau von Ernst's room. When she returned she took her place, as before, near the fire and sat staring intently into the embers. How insignificant, now, her own troubles had become!

Presently she heard the barking of dogs and the sound of wheels and stamping horses' hoofs. In a moment more Louis came into the room.

"You're back, Louis," she said.

"Yes, Miss. A pretty dark night in them woods, too. But I got more mail for you."

He held out some papers and a letter. She took them without speaking. Something in her attitude discouraged conversation and after an instant he said,

"Well, good-night, Miss."

"Good-night."

When he was gone, she looked down at the letter in her hand. She recognized, with a sudden throbbing of her heart, that the writing on the envelope was Lorme's. She gazed at it for an instant and then, kneeling before the fire, laid the unopened letter on the coals.

XLI

COLLINGSWORTH returned to New York eagerly. He had spent the preceding week in Canada, and had had no word from Virginia. He felt sure that some mistake about forwarding had been made, and that a letter from her must be awaiting him at his office there. But in this he was disappointed. A pile of miscellaneous papers were handed to him, but among them was not the communication he so impatiently desired to find. He remembered how unlike herself she had been when he last saw her, and fearing that she was ill, decided to telegraph as soon as he had disposed of one or two matters that demanded his instant attention. But this attention he found it difficult, at first, to give. He sat in his inner office, with an opened report before him, his thoughts full of Virginia, and of a proposition recently made to him, which, in a way, involved her.

Owing to recent developments, the question had come up of entire disassociation from Columbia, and of establishing himself in St. Louis. In a way the change would be advantageous. His firm had active ramifications in the south and west as well as the north, and the location would be a central one. Also, the inducements offered would be very great. That, of course, would have no weight with Virginia, he thought, remembering their conversation in the automobile on the way to Lake End. And he smiled. How unlike everyone else she was! On the whole, he doubted whether

Cousin Julia

she would care for the idea. Besides, in Columbia, he could be of use to Mr. Bradford. If the proposed factories and terminal were taken there, he could throw an immense amount of business to the Bradford firm, to say nothing of the real alliance that was projected for later. Collingsworth always made up his mind quickly, and the St. Louis project he now decided to reject definitely.

Then he turned to his immediate business. He examined his mail rapidly, slitting unopened letters with one deft movement of the letter opener, reading, assorting, and assimilating the contents with the cool efficiency of a trained man of affairs. Tom was a thorough business man, keen, entirely honest if somewhat ruthless, quick to seize every possible advantage, hard to deal with, impossible to beat, but vastly generous of his gains. He knew the game, and played it resolutely for all it held, and had no illusions or imaginative thrills concerning it. A half hour passed this way, and then a stenographer entered with the later mail.

"Mr. Bradford to see you, Mr. Collingsworth."

She laid the letters on his desk and withdrew. Tom sprang to his feet to welcome Virginia's father. Mr. Bradford's arrival was not unexpected, as Tom had known that J. C. intended to come to New York, but had not known just when he expected to arrive.

The weather in New York was still very hot, but Mr. Bradford's clothing knew no concessions. When he traveled he wore a long frock coat and a broad-brimmed felt hat, and in this costume he appeared today. His steel-rimmed spectacles were supplanted by gold ones, but these, too, had a way of resting far down his nose, and above them his steady blue eyes met the world kindly. The two men exchanged cordial

Cousin Julia

greetings and J. C., holding his hat in his hand, sat down near the window. Tom had wanted to take it from him, had wanted him even to have his coat off and be cool, but the older man refused.

"When did you leave home, Mr. Bradford?"

"Well, I guess it was some over a week ago."

"Oh, as long as that? Then you've been here some days."

"Yes. I'm through now."

"That's good. Bad weather to strike this town. We haven't got that cold wave yet you've been having."

"No."

"How," Tom then inquired, feeling a trace of boyish self-consciousness as he did so, "did you leave them all?"

"Pretty well," replied the other shortly.

"The Lormes still staying on, of course?"

J. C. stuffed his handkerchief back into his coat pocket, leaving a banner of white draped over the edge.

"Why, no. They're getting ready to leave."

Tom was surprised. He thought Louise had told him they would not go for some time.

"You don't say so! That's quite sudden, isn't it?"

"Yes, I guess it is, in a way."

The young man turned to his desk. "I like that fellow—Lorme," he remarked casually.

J. C. made no comment. There was a moment of silence, and then he observed,

"Have you heard anything from Virgie lately?"

Tom was looking through his desk for a box of cigars.

"No," he said, and then, "why, look here," he exclaimed, having caught sight of an envelope on top of the pile of letters the secretary had just laid there;

Cousin Julia

"here's a letter from her now, upon my word! Must have just come. By George, that's good! I'll just have a look at it right away, if you don't mind. But wait a minute; have one of these cigars, Mr. Bradford; they're fine. Just got 'em."

J. C. helped himself.

"I'll read it now. It won't take me a minute, and you see I haven't had one for I don't know how long!" Tom smiled rather foolishly.

Mr. Bradford nodded, and hanging his hat on his somewhat baggy knee, struck a match, and was about to light his cigar when an exclamation from Tom arrested him midway. He dropped the match, and laying the cigar on the window sill, gripped his hat again, staring down at it.

"For God's sake, Mr. Bradford, she can't mean this! She can't be serious!"

J. C. said nothing, but Tom, in his excitement, did not notice his silence.

"There's some mistake—she's heard something—somebody's been lying about me! Why, we were to be married in a few weeks! It's impossible!" He crushed the paper in his hand. "I'll telegraph; no, I'll go out there right away—I can get the \$30."

Mr. Bradford was still silent, and the fact that he had made no comment suddenly reached Tom's consciousness.

"Mr. Bradford, did you know about this?"

The older man nodded.

"But what in the devil is it? What does she mean?"

"What does she say?" said J. C.

Tom glanced again at the crumpled letter in his hand.

Cousin Julia

DEAR TOM [it read]:

You couldn't have got my other letter or you wouldn't have gone on writing. Please don't any more. Oh, Tom, I'm sorry. This will make you unhappy for a while, and I know what it is to be unhappy. But don't grieve too much, I'm not worth it. Only forget me. I would give you my love if I could, but I can't.

"She says that it's all over, that I'm to forget her. Why, it's simply absurd—some awful mistake. I'll go out there right away."

"I wouldn't, Tom."

"Look here," demanded the young man excitedly, "what's at the bottom of all this?"

"I guess," said J. C. patiently, turning his hat round and round in his hand, "I guess Virgie just made a mistake in the beginning, that's all. I guess she thought she loved you and then found out that she didn't."

"Nonsense!" came the sharp retort. Tom left his desk and paced angrily back and forth across the room. "That sounds like some rubbish out of a book. Virginia isn't a baby—grown-up people don't imagine they're in love one minute and then imagine they're not the next! She decided she wanted to marry me and told me so, and she must have some real reason, or thinks she has, for chucking it all now. And I'm going out as fast as they can get me there and find out what it is."

"I wouldn't go, Tom. It's——"

"I just will, though," he broke in.

"It's simply that Virginia doesn't love you, nothing else."

"Well, if she's refusing to marry me at the last minute this way because she doesn't love me, then there's

Cousin Julia

just one of two explanations for it. Either she never did love me, or else there's another man."

There was a pause. Tom halted before J. C. and stared at him full of resentful astonishment.

"Well," said the other at last, "I guess you've struck it. I guess both of those reasons are true."

It was a harsh way to put it, but he had decided that there should be no more lies, no more half truths. Collingsworth's face turned white, and for a moment such a wave of anger, of outrage and of jealousy swept over him that he clenched his hands together lest they do violence to this quiet old man who sat there telling him how he had been fooled. Some seconds elapsed before he could trust himself to speak.

"So," he said at last in a voice he scarcely recognized as his own, "she lied first and then cheated."

"We can't talk about it that way, Tom," said J. C. with quiet dignity. He rose. "You haven't been treated right, my boy, I know that. But if there's any blame, it's not Virginia's."

"Indeed!" replied Tom bitterly. He turned to the window and squared his shoulders defiantly.

"Even if it were explained, I guess you couldn't be expected to understand now," went on Mr. Bradford gently. "It's natural you shouldn't. However, it don't help matters whether you do or not. It wouldn't help a bit if you did." Mr. Bradford was not gifted with words, and after a bit he added, "I'm sorry."

"Sorry!" thought Tom. It was easy enough to be sorry for people, he'd been sorry lots of times for other people's calamities, but what good did that do? What good did it do him now, in the face of this intolerable disappointment? He had been thrown over at the last moment, chucked like an old shoe! He had never

Cousin Julia

wanted anything in his life before that he hadn't got, and now the thing that he wanted most had been dangled before his eyes, promised him, and then suddenly snatched away. Hopes, desires whose violence he had hitherto scarcely realized, had all come to nothing. Nothing! And with it all was the burning sense of having been made a fool of, lied to, as he had said, cheated!

"You can tell her," he said at last, "that I don't even want to know who he is. That I shall never see her again. I'm through for good and all." That was it. He would take the St. Louis offer. There was one advantage anyway in being rich—you could live where you chose and at least he would not have to see her with the lover she had preferred to him, to whom she had found—a little late he thought sarcastically, but still found—that she *could* give her love!

Mr. Bradford watched him for a moment in silence. He felt deeply sorry for him and ashamed, too, as if he had been in some way to blame. He would have liked to have found for him some word of sympathy or encouragement that would seem adequate, but could think of nothing to say. However, it didn't matter. Talking wouldn't help it and he would just go.

"Well, Tom," he said at length, "I guess I'll be going." For a moment there was no answer. Tom did not look at him. In the bitter resentment of his mood he felt impelled at first to let him go without a word or a handshake. Then a better impulse conquered. He turned and held out his hand.

"Good-by, Mr. Bradford. Perhaps I'll see you again, as I'll have to spend a day or two in Columbia and close out my affairs. I'm transferring to St. Louis." He took a certain cruel satisfaction in announcing this, as he suspected that the Bradford firm

Cousin Julia

had counted a great deal on an alliance with his, and that they were not without need of help.

J. C. made no comment. They shook hands and then, pulling his black felt hat well down over his head, Mr. Bradford silently left the room.

XLIII

WHEN he emerged once more into the hot street he paused and looked irresolutely up and down the avenue. His business in New York was finished, and the dismal prospect of some hours of leisure was before him. He was glad the interview was over. He had dreaded it, hated witnessing the pain his family, in some way or other, had, unfairly, it seemed to him, inflicted. But it had seemed to be his duty to go through with it, and in questions of duty J. C. was not in the habit of consulting his pleasure. Indeed, he would not have been able to remember, had it occurred to him to try—which it didn't—when, at any time, anything had ever been a question of his pleasure. He had, all his life, simply gone on taking upon himself burden after burden, increasing steadily his output to keep pace with the requirements of Julia Bradford's obsession. And now he was getting old, and pretty weary.

But as he walked up the avenue, his long, thin hands hanging awkwardly from sleeves no tailor, however expert, could make to look as though they fitted, he was not thinking about that, at least not in a personal way. Perhaps one of the well-earned recompenses of an unselfish life is the fact that in moments of ill fortune one is not troubled with self-pity. He did consider that he was no longer as young or as strong as the occasion required, but only in relation to the renewed necessity of hauling the load unaided, alone. To demand the re-

Cousin Julia

removal of superfluous cargo did not occur to him. He would do what he could, and when it got too heavy—well, his was the type that dies in harness.

There was one way, however, in which he would assert himself, there was one understanding that must be reached, and that was simply that the route mapped out for him be a straight one. He did not dwell much on this phase. He came to the conclusion hastily and passed on. He was not given to analysis and an analysis that must inevitably lead to criticism he would have considered unpardonably disloyal. He did not ask himself whether the results of this lifelong loyalty to his wife and unquestioning acquiescence in her desires and purpose had been productive of the best results, nor did he consider what profit or joy he himself had derived from it all.

Instead, he walked on aimlessly, his eyes on the ground, unobservant of the motley crowd that streamed past him. His mind was straining toward a solution, not of psychological but of material difficulties. He sought, quite simply, for some way to make more money, for some way to keep filled a reservoir so unceasingly drained. And to the passers-by, had they observed him, he would have seemed merely an old man who had studied life in a hard school and who had just about reached the end of the course.

XLIV

WHEN did you say father would be back?" Virginia inquired. She had just returned from the country, and had found her mother in the small upstairs sitting room that opened on her own and her husband's bedroom. It was the one home-like spot in the house, though the original grace of the apartment was obliterated by the presence of possessions of long standing, chairs and pictures and odds and ends upon which J. C. had fixed his affections and, with irrevocable obstinacy, determined to retain.

Outside, the hard light of a somber, gusty day, autumnly prophetic, was fading into dusk. Mrs. Bradford sat by the window, her hands, empty for once of letters or tatting, folded in her lap. She seemed unaccountably idle. Her face wore a pinched look and the tip of her nose was more permanently red. Mrs. Bradford could not be expressive of the softness of melancholy, but there was about her an air of stoical grief, an expression profoundly sad, but which had robbed affliction of any alleviating tenderness. She had worn this look since the morning when the truth about her daughter's marriage had been conveyed to her.

Mrs. Bradford was essentially American, American of puritan ancestry and type. She knew, of course, that what she called evil existed, but she never expected it and was always surprised by it and horrified. Her ideas of right and wrong were both definite and extremely conventional. Murder was wrong, stealing was

Cousin Julia

wrong, and infidelity to one's lawfully wedded mate was only a shadow less so. And, with Anglo-Saxon self-deception—there is a type of Anglo-Saxon which never seems to become really sophisticated—she believed that these things never actually happen to people of means. Of course, the last of them had befallen her sister years before but that was, she felt, an amazing and exceptional thing, a something entirely remote from everyday life. Besides, her sister had married a foreigner and a musician, so almost anything was to be expected. The fact that Lorme, too, was a foreigner, had been quite overshadowed in her consciousness by the fact that he was also an aristocrat. A real foreigner was a poor one, a musician, an unsuccessful painter or a swarthy unknown laying sewer pipes on Main Street. And even now, for all his perfidy, Félix remained to her a Marquis, not a Frenchman, and the tragedy of her pretty, blonde, stubborn sister Lucy, deserted by a preposterous musician, bore no similarity to that of that sister's namesake Louise, Marquise de Lorme, betrayed by a titled husband.

There is often a curious, fateful repetition in the lives of families. Although Mrs. Bradford had never perceived it, Louise singularly resembled her aunt, and, like the latter, would never have granted a divorce to a husband who, lured by her fair prettiness into marrying her, had soon been completely disillusioned and alienated by her infuriating limitations.

These considerations, however, were not occupying Mrs. Bradford. The former tragedy had long since become history, and had, like history, lost immediate relevance and poignancy. She was intent on but one thing—Louise's unhappiness. That her daughter—the sudden knowledge of whose wrongs had struck her

Cousin Julia

mother to the heart—should be living knowingly in a desecrated union, shocked and tortured her. And yet, notwithstanding her honest suffering, she clung as doggedly as did her daughter to the splendid seeming of this marriage. The world, at least, was impressed, and that was the great, great thing. As for Violet Tillinghurst's part in the affair, Mrs. Bradford was so scandalized, so utterly surprised and appalled at her wickedness and her ingratitude, that she could not bring herself to think of her, indeed she did not know how or what to think.

Drearly then, and motionless, she sat by the window of her haunted sitting room, whose ghosts were those shabby chairs and ugly pictures, the companions of another life.

Virginia had taken off her hat and was holding it on her lap. She was sitting on the arm of a chair, idly thrusting a hatpin in and out of the dark blue serge that smoothly outlined her knee. She had told her mother briefly about their visit to The Pines, and had learned that her father was expected that evening.

"He ought to be along 'most any time now," said her mother. "The train gets in at five and he'll hardly go to the office so late."

"I'll wait and see him then, before I dress," said the girl, sliding off the arm of the chair into the seat. She picked up a magazine, and from among its pages slipped a folded letter without an envelope. It fluttered to the floor and lay face up between them. "Dear Cousin Julia," was written large in Violet's handwriting. Virginia hastily picked it up and thrust it back between the pages. Mrs. Bradford had looked away from the letter and neither of them spoke of it.

"There's the evening paper," said her mother. "I

Cousin Julia

see the Winfield Watsons are off at last. They sailed yesterday."

Virginia took the paper and examined it abstractedly, turning the wide rustling sheets back and forth. Her eyes followed the headlines, but she was not aware of what they rested on. She was thinking nervously of what she had to tell her mother, and she was afraid, afraid of her anger, and in shrinking dread of her disappointment. She also thought of J. C. and the possible consequences for him of her action. In the turmoil of her emotion for Lorme, and amid the remote silences of the pine woods, it had been easy to disregard consequences. But back here in these usual and matter-of-fact surroundings, those consequences were upon her and they frightened her. What had she done? she asked herself. Had she indeed brought ruin on them all? She was inexperienced, utterly ignorant of financial matters. Did her mother's hints on the afternoon when she demanded Virginia's acceptance of Tom mean absolute poverty for them if she failed to do so? Poverty—starvation? Panic-stricken she thought again of Louise and Félix. Félix! If she had married Tom she would have served him, the man she loved so hopelessly, so crazily, in spite of everything. Perhaps if she did so her lifelong sacrifice would purify that love and expiate it. But what of Tom, to whom such a course would be so obviously unfair?

So all the torturing doubts and conflicting issues were upon her again. How could there be so many sides to a question? Surely there had never been a situation before where it would not be possible to say quite definitely, this is the right and that the wrong way. She had yet to learn the endless complexity of human affairs, the wheels within wheels on which we revolve, the

Cousin Julia

shifting formlessness of life. That the truth is not one, but multiple, and that what you say is white and I say is black is perhaps both and we are both right—or wrong. Most of us, perhaps, do not learn this at all, and from our failure is born intolerance—the stupidest crime of humanity against itself. And dominating all her reflections was the senseless fear of her mother, of the necessity that faced her of coming to grips at last with the ominous force of whose existence she had always been vaguely aware. She longed for her father's return, and it was with a feeling of deep relief that she at last heard him mounting the stairs. She dropped her paper and rushed to meet him.

“Is that you, Father?” she called.

“It's me,” he replied, and they met at the door. He responded fondly to her big embrace, and let her take from him the bag which he had refused to relinquish to a servant. He bent over his wife, who kissed him, and then sat down on the sofa. He looked tired. Virginia went to him and seating herself beside him, put her arm through his, and leaned her head on his shoulder. She trusted and loved him as she did no one else, and today her heart went out to him with peculiar tenderness. He patted her hand, and after coughing once or twice in an ineffectual effort to clear his throat of a certain embarrassed huskiness, he said,

“Mother, and you, Virgie, I've got something to say to you both.” Mrs. Bradford looked up in surprise, and took her eyeglasses, which were lying on the window, into her hand. Virginia felt a premonitory tightening about her heart. She seemed to foresee that he had something of importance, of importance to her, to say to them. He looked at his wife and then away from her, and patted Virginia's hand steadily.

Cousin Julia

"I saw Tom while I was away," he began.

Mrs. Bradford glanced at him sharply.

"In fact," he went on, "I stayed over in New York especially to see him. I wanted to tell him once and for all that Virgie isn't going to marry him."

"Jim!" cried Mrs. Bradford, "what are you thinking of?"

"Please don't say anything, Mother," he said, still without looking at her. There was a sternness in his voice she had not heard before. "There isn't anything at all to be said. My girl," he went on, turning to Virginia, "I know all about things. I got to understand before I went away. It's going to be all right now."

"What nonsense is this?" said his wife, rising, her thin lips trembling slightly. "Virginia, what have you been saying to your father?"

"Julia!" J. C. rose, too, and with one hand clenched the top of a chair near him. There was a tense pause, during which husband and wife stood facing each other. When he spoke again his voice was more gentle.

"Virgie has never spoken to me about anything. It was just that I found out she didn't love him. That's all. Perhaps," he spoke still more gently, "perhaps she thought she was helping me, I like to think that. Maybe she figured I had good deal of a load to carry and this young fellow's money would help me do it. Well, I guess it would have. Maybe I won't be able to carry it without him, but things being as they are with Virgie, this ain't the kind of help I want. If I fail it will be a decent failure, anyhow."

He let go of the chair and turned to go.

"When you think it over, Mother, you'll be glad. You were anxious for Louise to marry for love——"

Cousin Julia

He paused and then added, "We have two daughters and it's our aim and duty to make them both equally happy."

He had spoken with a perfect finality and no one seemed impelled to say anything when he had done. Virginia felt suddenly guilty. She hated to have him think she had been prepared to make a sacrifice for him which she had not, after all, intended to make. How had he learned of the way she felt, and how, if he had seen Tom, had he not learned of her letter, the letter written from The Pines? And then it occurred to her that he did, that he must know of it, but had chosen to assume himself the responsibility of the ruptured marriage to shield her from her mother's displeasure. What goodness, what delicacy, she thought, her heart melting with gratitude, how understanding and how kind he was! She went to him and put her hand in his.

What he knew of his wife's share in the matchmaking would have been impossible to say. His averted gaze and his omissions seemed to indicate some further knowledge or suspicions, and the blankness of his tone might have been forced to hide reproach and sorrowful indignation. Perhaps Mrs. Bradford did not answer because she felt this. At any rate she sat down again in her chair and turned her face to the window. Virginia left the room with her father, and she was alone—alone in the room with its remnants of shabby and detested mediocrity.

Was there to be a return to that mediocrity? Was her splendid edifice to collapse because of the romanticism of a foolish girl, and the incredible scruples of an old man who had suddenly become a stranger to her? Did she, for the moment, hate him? Her first thought, one of stabbing intensity, was for Louise. How intol-

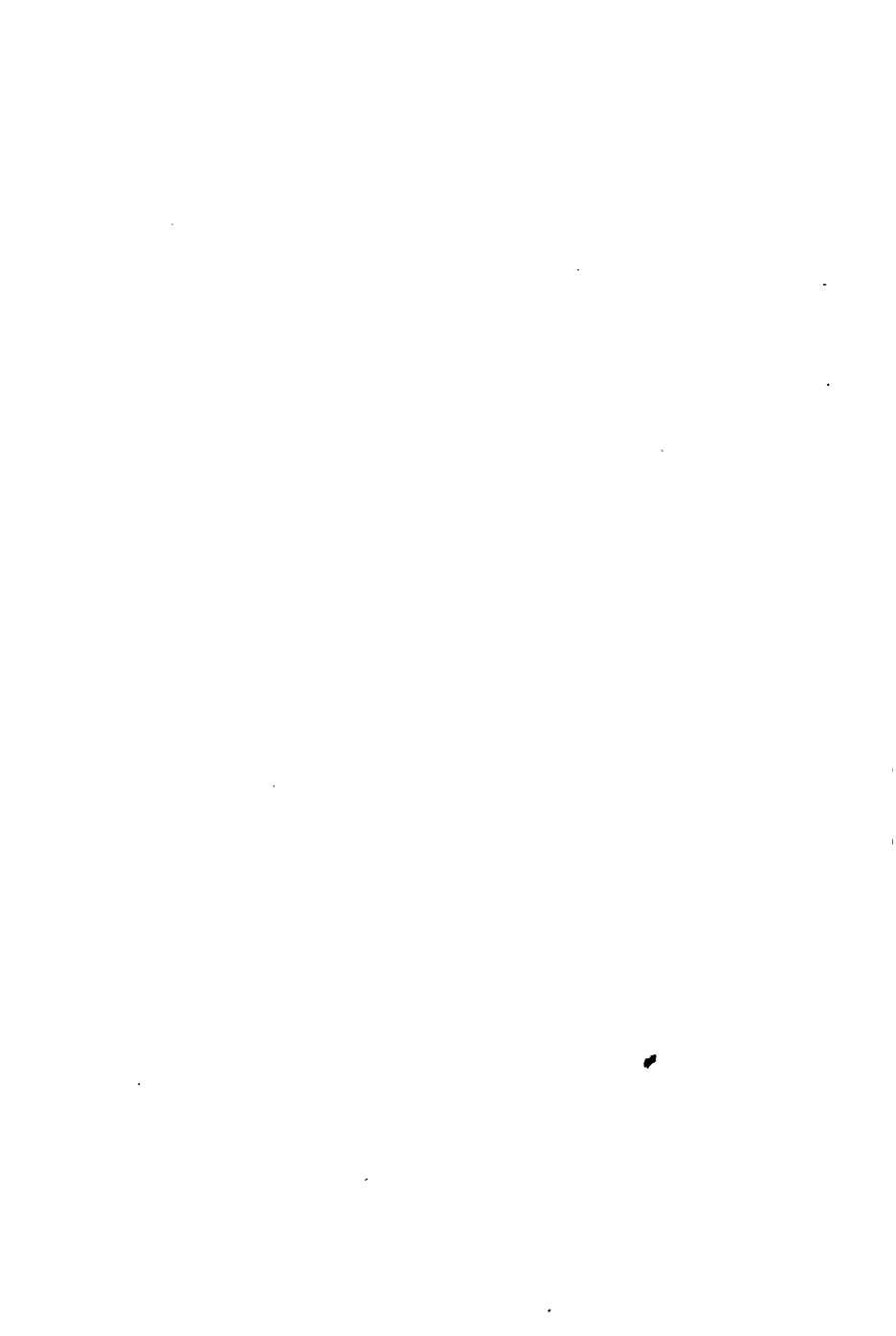
Cousin Julia

erable her situation would be without wealth! And then she thought of her own position here, her splendid house, her hopes for Virginia—all perhaps lost, at an end! She had striven relentlessly all her life and what had she gained? Not the happiness of her child, perhaps not even the triumph of permanent riches!

For a long time she remained quietly seated, while the room darkened about her, and outside the yellow leaves trembled on the restless branches of the elms, or loosening, drifted slowly to the ground. At last she rose. The habit of a lifetime was strong upon her. She had always been a fighter and like a true fighter refused to recognize defeat. The ghastly spirit of failure that had crept into the still room and seemed about to seize her, must be exorcised. The fine, straight line between her brows, that deepened when she thought intently, reappeared, and, lightly, the faint tattoo of her eyeglasses on the table top recommenced. Then she went to the writing table and sat down.

The letter she wrote was a long one, and all the acquired tact, the cunning of many years of strategy, went into it. It was her masterpiece, and in it explanation, flattery, persuasion, appeal, succeeded each other in leading up to the final and supreme exhortation—wait! The letter was addressed to Collingsworth.

PART III
COMPROMISE



XLV

SOME time had passed since the morning when the solid ground of complacency gave way beneath his feet and left Tom hanging over a rather dark abyss into whose unplumbed depths he found himself gazing for the first time.

The great pit that thwarted hopes, disillusionment, failure, have dugged for every wayfarer through this incredibly hoping world, had, until now, existed outside of Collingsworth's experience, and it was with amazement and anger rather than grief that he discovered it.

Anger—that was indeed his first sensation when Virginia's father left him—anger at being hurt and thwarted. He had gone back to his desk with a species of bravado to take up his work where he had left it, but the delusion that he could think of anything except of what had happened and of Virginia was soon destroyed. Yet he did not want to think of her or of the whole bitterly disappointing fiasco. To think of it was to suffer, and Tom wanted with all the strength of his virile and optimistic temperament not to suffer. He never had suffered—other people did, he knew, but he had not, and he told himself he would not. Perhaps that is what optimism really is, a determination not to suffer, not to allow whatever blows life may deal to hurt you. He opened reports and sat staring at them blankly. He could not focus his mind on what was before him and he strove to keep it from considering anything else, and all the time he was filled with the con-

Cousin Julia

sciousness of the dreary void that had been made in his life. At last he left his desk irritably and, taking his hat, went out into the street. He walked quickly, with an absorbed, a determined, expression, as though he were on an errand of importance and anxious to arrive. As a matter of fact he scarcely knew where he was going and only found on reaching there that he had mechanically taken the direction of one of his clubs.

It was still early and the rooms were almost deserted. Tom felt annoyed. He had wanted to talk to someone. At last, in the lounge, he discovered an acquaintance, a man he scarcely knew and for whom he had always felt a vague antipathy. But he now crossed the room to where the man was sitting by a window, his hat tilted forward over his eyes, looking out into the Avenue. Tom sat down beside him, wishing he could remember his name. However, it didn't matter.

"Hello," he said; "let's do something."

The man looked at him in surprise. Tom had never seemed before to lack for something to do or someone to do it with. It also occurred to him that Collingsworth looked ill.

"What do you want to do?" he responded.

"Oh, I don't care, anything."

"Have a drink," said the other.

"Why, that's a good idea," returned Tom with more animation. "I hadn't thought of that."

Again the man looked at him in surprise. Tom had a drink and then several more, and for a time felt better—not cheered precisely, but relieved. His melancholy remained, but became interesting rather than dreary. The little exasperating pain that had been plaguing him lessened. He began, moreover, to find his companion attractive. He wondered why he had dis-

Cousin Julia

liked him and wished he could recall his name. They decided on lunch together and the ball game, and Tom sent for his car and drove uptown himself.

But when they reached the restaurant where they were to lunch, he had no desire for food. He ordered another drink and found that that even was repellent to him. He left it untasted and gradually a feeling of renewed depression overcame him, and an intense distaste for the man whose name he couldn't remember. He decided that it would be quite impossible to go to the ball game with him. The bleak realization of his disappointment had again invaded him.

The surprise his behavior had awakened in his companion turned to amazement when, after paying the check, Tom made some incoherent excuse and left him. He did not take offense, however, as he had decided that there was something distinctly wrong with Tom. His explanation was brief and sweeping. "Nutty!" he exclaimed profoundly, and dismissed the matter with a shrug.

Tom returned to his office, determined not to think, determined to keep his mind on other things until time had dulled the edge of this horrid disappointment that was waiting to cut into his heart, or until he could open his eyes and find that the chasm of defeat that had yawned before him that morning in which so many were engulfed and into which he himself seemed to be slipping was no longer there. He did not know that those who have had experience of the grim cavern look at it steadily, for they have learned that eyes become accustomed to the dark and end by seeing dimly the other side and the steep trail of forgetfulness or compensation. Meanwhile he was angrily unhappy. There is so much in being used to things and Tom was

Cousin Julia

not used to being hurt. Repeated blows harden the skin, but becoming inured to them is a painful process.

He strove all the afternoon to keep his tormentors at bay, using himself more in the struggle than he would have done in acceptance, and exhausted, furious, with nerves ajangle, remained at his desk till the office closed. He avoided the club where he had gone at noon, which, like the man he had taken to lunch, now filled him with detestation—they were connected too closely with the harrowing day he had passed. There was no place he wanted to go, no one he wanted to see. At last he bought himself an armful of papers and went to his rooms, resolved upon dining and spending the evening alone. But he didn't like to read—it is doubtful whether he had ever read even a story through in his life. He soon exhausted the illustrations and the various articles on golf form and finally flounced out again and dropped in at a theater.

He sat through most of the play which he found peculiarly stupid and fatuous and then, perceiving some acquaintances who would be likely to pick him up, left before the performance was ended and went home. He wanted to go to sleep. A night's sleep had always remedied his difficulties and he had no doubt the world would look a great deal brighter the next morning. But after he was in bed with the lights out and the windows opened, he found himself unexpectedly wakeful, or worse than that, if he drowsed at all and his tired mind lost its grasp on realities, he would find it slipping back into the old groove, unconsciously completing some plan concerning Virginia, dwelling on some pleasant memory or anticipation from which he roused himself to wrench it painfully back to reality.

Suddenly he recalled the one endurable moment of

Cousin Julia

the day—the interval that had followed the four or five drinks he had taken at the club. He got up immediately and, switching on the lights, went out into his sitting room and found a set of decanters that stood always full on his table. They were always full, as it seldom, if ever, occurred to him to drink anything alone in his rooms. He poured out half a tumbler of something and, wrapping himself in his dressing gown, sat down by the table with a cigarette and a sporting paper.

Perhaps people would judge each other very differently, or perhaps they would not judge each other at all, if they bore in mind how different a thing seems when you are doing it yourself from the way it appears to you when someone else is doing it. Tom had always had a very sincere dislike of intemperate drinking. He felt distaste or even contempt for men who got drunk. He himself had always drunk moderately because he had no desire to drink otherwise. His abstinence was not an act of will—merely an inclination. He didn't think about it at all. And now that he felt inclined to drink immoderately he didn't think about it either. He just did it.

At first it was only when he missed Virginia most acutely and his sense of loss and disappointment was strongest that he turned to this fickle comforter who as often increases as deadens our pain. But gradually he fell into the habit of doing it constantly, for something to do to pass the time, because all his usual activities bored or irritated him, and because he had convinced himself that nothing any longer mattered now that he had not got what he wanted. He drank without consciously asking himself why he did it, but if he had he would have imagined it was for any of the mil-

Cousin Julia

lion ingenious reasons people have invented for drinking during the million more or less years it has co-existed with humanity. That he really did it to escape, from sheer cowardice, and to shirk the bad moments with himself that he did not care to face, did not of course occur to him. He was not analytical. And, as has been said, he by no means realized how much he was drinking. In another man he would have considered it the utmost intemperance, in himself it was simply taking another drink whenever he wanted it—which, as it happened, was most of the time.

He went to the office in the mornings as usual, but he was secretly impatient for the time to pass so that he could get away and go to the club where he would find the cocktails whose stimulus he craved, and amuse himself with the conversational give and take of the men, which, after he did get there, bored him. In the afternoon he played bridge, hour after hour, with an interest stimulated by a succession of whiskeys and sodas.

At night he sometimes accepted a social invitation, but more often drifted about with any of the men he knew who happened to be at large. It didn't matter much who they were so long as they kept going. The evening ended, usually, with bridge or poker, played in a smoky room until dawn, amid a litter of empty bottles and the odor of whiskey and dead cigars. He was not amused. He had always liked cards and had previously enjoyed an occasional night of bridge very much. But then such a night had been an exception, occurring once a week or once a fortnight. Then he had not drunk so much during the game and had left earlier with a light-hearted sense that it was a mere temporary passing of the time until the delightful epi-

Cousin Julia

sode of his marriage should take place. That pleasant eventuality glowed in the recesses of his being with a rosy warmth that cheered and stimulated him and encouraged his general unquestioning impression of himself as a favorite of fortune.

Now he played with an acrid intensity, and although he was scarcely amused, he was at least distracted—there is no better anaesthesia than gambling—and left the game with a reluctance he had not known before. Reluctant because when he stopped he became conscious of his aching head, of the dull, damnable sense of futility—the darkness within where formerly the flame of a delicious anticipation had dwelt.

He had, at the very beginning, received Mrs. Bradford's letter and had read it with confused sensations. It puzzled him and also angered him. He suspected more trickery. His wound was so fresh that he could not bear to have it touched even with a new hope and, with an instinct of self-preservation, he would not allow himself to entertain a hope on such a slender basis. He would not be hurt twice. Moreover, at that time he believed he hated Virginia. But he saved the letter and once or twice during the months of willful dissipation that followed he thought of it.

His attention to business became more and more desultory. He did nothing definite and carelessly postponed from month to month his removal to St. Louis,

XLVI

WINTER rushed upon Columbia that year in the wild form of a blizzard—an old-fashioned blizzard, as it was always called. Just why it was called old-fashioned does not appear, as blizzards unfortunately in no way belonged to the past. They throve odiously in the present, and arrived as regularly as the winter fashions. Splendid, too, in their way, were these devastating whirlwinds of sleet and snow that swept the great lakes to the wail of vessels in distress and fell upon the city with the same icy fury they had when its site was a mere expanse of rocking pines, which they would have when it became, perhaps, the ruined landmark of a vanished civilization.

Mrs. Bradford, however, was not in the least interested in the weather, nor was she visited by any reflections on the impermanence of cities or the evanescence of existence—least of all by that of her own. Her point of view was neither historic nor cosmic. Actualities were realities to her, the only ones, and with them she was vastly concerned. And, as we have seen, she was not a passive observer of events.

After the few moments of discouragement she had yielded to on the autumn afternoon when circumstances had seemed about to shake off her domination and go their own way—after that one instant of faltering—she had turned her back on defeat. The letter to Collingsworth was written on impulse, but subsequent reflection did not cause her to regret her action. To be

Cousin Julia

sure, she thought about the whole matter carefully, even permitting herself to consider giving up the pursuit. There were other rich men in the world and one might be found suited both to her own requirements and to Virginia's imaginative aspirations. But she soon rejected this idea. Such a possibility was altogether too vague and in the interval there was no telling what ineligible suitor might not pop up and win the girl's incalculable approval. She refused to tolerate the idea of any but a rich husband for Virginia—Collingsworth was richer than anybody and was, moreover, a definite goal toward which to work. She decided that her best chances lay with him. So she returned to the quest with determination, a determination intensified perhaps by a small, deep-hidden resentment she now entertained toward her husband and her adopted daughter.

Her only direct reference to the affair for many months was a request she made to Virginia shortly after the momentous interview that followed Mr. Bradford's return. It was on the following afternoon and Virginia, in soft green cloth with a ruffled white collar and broad tilted hat, was about to go out. She had been looking unusually lovely since her stay in the country and felt a certain lightness of mood today she had not known for some time. As she came downstairs Mrs. Bradford called to her,

"Is that you, Virgie?"

"Yes, Mother——" She paused. "What is it?"

Mrs. Bradford did not answer and Virginia went to the door of the room where she was sitting and looked in.

"I see you're going out."

"Why, yes. I haven't seen anyone I know for so long I thought I'd——"

Cousin Julia

"Come in a minute." Her mother inspected her calmly. "You look real well today. That green was always becoming to you."

Virginia brushed through the portières and went to a panel mirror in the wall to straighten her hat. Mrs. Bradford was gifted with an excellent taste in dress and was always critical of her daughters' appearance. Her cool but approving gaze rested for a moment longer on the slender figure in hunting green, on the winsome profile and softly colored cheek turned from her, and then she looked out of the window. The trees were almost bare and the hills beyond wore a still look of autumnal waiting. Mrs. Bradford did not see the landscape her eyes rested on with such an air of quiet scrutiny. She held some half-finished work in her lap and her eyeglasses lay on the window sill beside her.

"By the way, Virginia," she said casually, "I think it would be better if you didn't say anything just yet about your engagement being broken off. You would do your father and me a great favor if you didn't say anything about it at all, not just yet."

Virginia turned sharply and the color leaped to her cheeks.

"But——" she began.

"Of course," Mrs. Bradford interpolated, "you're at liberty to do as you please. I'm not asking you to obey me in this; it's only a suggestion."

Virginia did not speak.

"Do as you please," her mother repeated. "Only," she permitted herself a slight sigh and a look of saddened resignation, "only it would make it all a little easier for us in a number of ways if nothing abrupt were done. You see, little by little it will sort of be

Cousin Julia

forgotten and then when they hear it it will make less talk."

Virginia sat down abruptly. She felt suddenly as though she were being persecuted—a petty, relentless persecution she seemed unable to escape from. She had intended to announce very definitely that the whole thing was at an end—to get rid entirely of the past and to start out afresh. And now she found herself faced with the prospect of more equivocation. She determined to refuse. Mrs. Bradford, divining perhaps her attitude, went on,

"Of course your father is the last person to ask this or anything of you. You know how self-sacrificing he is."

Virginia nodded sadly.

"So I'm telling you because I know he won't, that it will help him if you do this. You know his business isn't in the best shape just now and the least thing sometimes makes a difference. Let him get turned round before this is all over town."

The net, it seemed to Virginia, was closing about her again.

"Some day you'll realize," her mother went on, taking up her eyeglasses, "that one has to consider other people besides oneself. I have always tried to spare your father—he isn't strong—and he will never spare himself. What I've done was partly for his good and just as much for yours. I was thinking for you, Virgie; some day you'll realize that, too."

They were sitting in the small writing room where Tom had kissed Virginia good-by when he had left her that last time. The room had windows only on one side and the cold north light struck harshly on her mother's face, bringing out its pallor and its sharp lines. She

Cousin Julia

had an air, too, of unwonted plaintiveness. Virginia was both sorry for her and vaguely repulsed by her, and she herself felt very much alone and in some way guilty. Her mother had uttered no reproach, but the feeling of one hung about her unvoiced and oppressive. What her mother asked was after all a small thing, and as it was to be done for her father's sake, it seemed impossible to refuse. To refuse was always hard for Virginia. She had a certain strength of character, but she was not stubborn—indeed it is perhaps only the weak or the stupid who really are stubborn. The fact of her peculiar relation with the Bradfords was also operative with her, Frau von Ernst's disclosures having left her with a distinct sense of obligation to them.

"Very well," she said after a moment, "I'll do anything I can to help."

"You mean you won't speak of it just now?"

"Yes."

Mrs. Bradford picked up her eyeglasses serenely and scratched her nose with them. "It seems to be a nice day to walk," she said. "Who are you going to see?"

"Oh, nobody. I think I'll go downtown instead," Virginia replied, rising. The pleasure had gone out of the day for her. "I'll go and look at furs—it will soon be time for them."

"New furs, Virgie?"

"Why, yes. My old ones are shabby."

"I'm sorry, daughter, but I don't think either of us ought to get anything new this year. I'm having my black made over."

Virginia looked at her mother in astonishment. Then it dawned on her that this, of course, was to be expected. Hadn't she been told they would be poorer—quite poor, perhaps? Of course she hadn't realized it,

Cousin Julia

but—no new clothes! Why she needed any number of things and she had always had, without a question, everything and more than everything she needed. She sat down again helplessly. There was no flicker of triumph in Mrs. Bradford's downcast eyes, but she went on,

“If you don't intend to ride much we might sell the horses. They're eating their heads off as it is. Only please, girly, whatever we do, don't let your father think you're being deprived of things. You know how he is. He'd want you to have them and say they didn't amount to much and it would mean more worry for him.”

Virginia rose and slowly unpinned her hat. She wondered if Louise, too, were being deprived of things and permitted herself to doubt it. But poor Louise—this on top of the disillusionment of her miserable marriage! This last thought smote Virginia with a sharp pang of guilt. She, too, had had her part in the ugly disloyalty of that relation.

XLVII

SO a newly ordered life began at the house in Highland Road. The blizzard came and went and left winter in its wake, and Virginia met it for the first time in many years in the gowns and furs of a previous season. This she did not specially mind, but there had developed about her a perpetual atmosphere of denial and economy she found it more difficult to accustom herself to. This scrimping and cramping in everything except a certain regard for the keeping up of appearances Mrs. Bradford made no effort to confine to what was important or necessary, nor did she fail to make it a prominent factor in their daily intercourse, discussing it, when she and Virginia were alone, with irritating persistence. It took an infinity of forms, from the dismissal of servants to the absurd extremity of foisting stews and hash in place of the usual roasts upon the family dinner table.

Virginia went out now even less than she had done during the summer. Her position had become, owing to her mother's request, an anomalous one, one which she felt to be both awkward and humiliating. If her engagement were to be discussed she would have, tacitly, to lie, or to disregard her promise to her mother, and she was not particularly good at lying. It was simpler to avoid people entirely, which she did, and the world having got quite accustomed to her seclusion, with the ease with which it accustoms itself to any effacement, thought very little about her. As nothing was said of

Cousin Julia

her engagement, it was assumed, doubtless, that the marriage would eventually take place.

Before, however, her seclusion had not been a solitary one. It had been shared by a companionship that was supremely satisfying. Now she was alone, and there were times when her resolution faltered, when she craved gayety and excitement to banish the twin specters of loneliness and a memory she expended all her resolution trying to destroy. But if she suggested, at such times, having people in to dine or dance, Mrs. Bradford, who calculated, perhaps, on that same loneliness as a part of her campaign, pleaded economy as an excuse and discouraged it.

The one really important saving that was being accomplished she did not discuss. No more checks were sent to Violet Tillinghurst. With a feeling of intense distaste Cousin Julia had forced herself to write to her, saying, somewhat curtly, that, having heard that Mr. Tillinghurst senior's affairs were improving, she would discontinue her contributions. The letter received a courteous reply from Violet, mailed in London, where she and Bob were now established. Whether, with her fine tact, she divined the reason for Mrs. Bradford's action or, indeed, whether she sought to explain it at all, did not appear. She accepted the ultimatum gracefully, lightly, with many expressions of gratitude and apology for such a long abuse of the other's generosity.

Meanwhile the white winter proceeded evenly and Virginia sought some activity to beguile the empty endless days. The piano she, for the moment, recoiled from. Her whole romance, such as it was, had woven itself about the black and white keyboard and at first every note of her repertory, every chord

Cousin Julia

even of her improvisations, evoked the memory of that romance with all the subtly reminiscent power of sound.

Toward that episode her attitude was one of unqualified disapproval. But people do not always detest what they disapprove of; the dislike has sometimes to be cultivated. As for Virginia, she desired only to smother the whole thing into oblivion, to have it vanish from her as wholly as the white cloud that sails beyond the horizon and leaves the sky serene. And to that end she avoided the dreaming hours at the piano that had once filled the vacant blue of her empyrean with vague and splendid shapes.

But the well-stocked library was at hand, filled with books that had not been put there to read, but some of which she did read—books she would not have supposed she could like but which she did like. Books of history, of philosophy, books that left her with a minimized sense of the importance of being young and beautiful, with a minimized sense of the importance, indeed, of being at all—of the being, that is, of any one individual even if that individual be oneself. This is an aging realization. Love, too, was presented to her as an important, an unquestionably important, biological incident rather than the semi-sacred and romantic mystery she herself considered it.

She spent much of her time with Frau von Ernst, for whom she now felt a greater and more realized affection. She seemed to Liebe Frau, and to Haslip as well, both older and more one of them than before, and sometimes took part in their habitual, endless discussions. In these discussions, often of such ambitious scope, she found herself leaning more toward Haslip's side than Frau von Ernst's. He held the balance, she

Cousin Julia

felt, between the latter's determined idealism and Mrs. Bradford's earth earthiness.

In a word, being for the moment without a flirtation or a love affair—a moment unique in her grown-up experience—even Davie was away—her mind was developing rather suddenly.

Her relations with her mother were, remarkably it seemed to Virginia, quite as they had always been. Mrs. Bradford's detachment was so complete, her self-possession was so cool and unfailing, that there was never an occasion, nor an opening, for intimate personal encounters or blunders.

Félix was not, of course, mentioned, nor was Collingsworth, although Mrs. Bradford managed to keep herself informed as to the movements of the latter. She knew a good deal about his life in New York and the postponed plans for St. Louis, and, late in the winter, she learned that he was ill.

XLVIII

SEVERAL months of extravagant drinking cannot but have their effect even on a constitution as robust as Collingsworth's. And while his illness was not a direct result of his intemperance, it is doubtful whether he would have fallen such a ready victim if he had been in his usual condition. As it was, he took pneumonia and took it hard and all but died of it.

It happened quite suddenly and he was taken to the house of his father's sister, Eliza Collingsworth, who herself had married a Collingsworth. She was a New Yorker, and what is more important, a fashionable New Yorker and a person of such magnificence generally that it was unquestionably as much to her as to Tom that Mrs. Bradford yearned to marry Virginia.

This feeling, however, had not been, especially at first, reciprocal. It was, in fact, with dismay not unmixed with horror that the august lady had learned that her only nephew had chosen to marry a Middle Westerner. But one becomes accustomed to anything; New York even becomes accustomed to the Middle West—except such New Yorkers as have had the misfortune to come from there—and she gradually came to accept the fact with resignation if not with delight. She appreciated beauty and Virginia's pictures had had their share in appeasing her and the fact of Louise's marriage had done much. Besides, as has been said, Tom was her only nephew and, although she was a woman of fashion, she was also—outside of matters pertaining

Cousin Julia

to her great position, which she conserved rigorously and even cruelly—a kindly woman.

Tom had literally never been ill before, so that the psychological, as well as the physical, experience of a long sickness was unknown to him. A man or woman ill is a vastly different person from a man or woman well, and it was not unnatural that this should be truer of Tom even than of most people. He had always lived in a gale of physical well-being, a thoughtless, cheerful existence full of surface activities. As good a way as any other, perhaps, to live as long as the sun shines. But perpetual sunshine does not seem to be nature's intention. When it was first obscured for him he had entered upon a career of somewhat sodden intemperance and then disease caught and swept him in a few days to the borderlands of death itself.

Of the fever and agony of the first two weeks of his illness little remained to him, but when the corner was turned and the long road back to health entered upon, it took him through a new country. There were discoveries to be made en route.

It was a snowy melting afternoon early in March and Tom's room—a long narrow apartment expensively furnished in Chinese Chippendale and heavy draperies of lavender and black—was filled with sunshine. His aunt kept her draperies as well as her antiques strictly up-to-date. She liked modernity and did her house over according to the prevalent whim whenever she was bored. The front windows looked across the Avenue into the park, but as it was the third floor that had been turned over to the invalid, he could only see, when he was propped up in bed, the waving bare branches of the trees. Just now he was propped up and a small table was swung across in front of him with

Cousin Julia

a tray on it. The gruel, the warm milk and soft-boiled egg were scarcely touched and an immense boredom held Tom motionless in its dreary vacuum.

It was only very recently that he had been strong enough to be bored. For many days after the crisis of the disease was passed, he had been merely a prostrate weakened thing, utterly spent from his mortal struggle and conscious of nothing but his fatigue. But now his convalescence was established and there was nothing to do, the doctor said, but get well. Nothing to do—that was just it, Tom thought savagely, absolutely nothing to do. He hated to read—he never looked at a book—and the magazine stories his nurse had tried to amuse him with did not interest him. It made him, moreover, nervous to listen. His aunt saw that he had every care, but could be with him very little herself. The season was still on and she was perpetually engaged. He enjoyed her occasional gossiping visits, but even if she could have been with him more he would not have had the strength to see her for very long. He had more than just pneumonia from which to recuperate. A prolonged régime of high balls and champagne does not leave the nerves in the steadiest condition.

The room was very still. Tom lay staring up at the patch of blue above the leafless tree tops visible from his half-curtained window, and his nurse sat near him reading. She was now his only attendant, the others having been sent away at Tom's request. His aunt would have enjoyed retaining a complete hospital staff to minister to him, but Tom insisted on as little fussing as possible. And indeed, Miss Bowie, a small, featherless owl of a woman with earnest dark eyes forever peering through double-lensed spectacles into a

Cousin Julia

book or into life generally which she contemplated with a serious, not to say stern, implacability, was quite capable of caring for him unaided. At last Tom pushed the table from him with peevish distaste.

"I shan't take it away till you've eaten something," she said.

"Why do you read all the time?" demanded Tom.

"Why don't you talk to me?"

She looked up from her book, blinking nearsightedly. "Perhaps I didn't think we would have very much in common."

"Don't you think so?" he said vaguely.

"Do you?"

"Why not," he replied without much interest, "as much as anybody?"

She observed him speculatively for a moment and then looked out of the window.

"Did you have any particular reason for thinking we wouldn't?" he persisted, mostly from a fretful desire to keep the conversation going.

"A person who has always had everything he wanted," she stated with her usual air of delivering a lesson in tabloid form, "is not like a person who has never had anything he desired."

"Does that make people different?" he inquired with a sudden interest.

"Yes."

Tom thought a moment. "You're wrong," he announced. "I know someone who's always had everything she wanted and she isn't a bit like me."

"You mean," she corrected him judicially, "that you thought she had everything she wanted. Very likely she didn't want what she had." The solution hung ponderously between them, unrelieved by any comment from

Cousin Julia

Tom. She seemed to be considering what she had said and then she added:

"You always wanted what you had, you know. Maybe she didn't."

"Some people don't know what they want," he observed with some irritation.

Miss Bowie shrugged her prim, rounded shoulders. "People who are easily satisfied always say that about those who aren't."

Tom did not hear her remark. His thoughts had rushed back to Virginia and his irritation vanished. Such a wave of longing for her swept over him that it caught his breath. He turned impatiently in bed and flung his arm over his face. It almost seemed to him he could see her there before him with her slim, beguiling figure, her sweet, dark-fringed eyes smiling but perpetually mysterious. He was still so weak that he was afraid for a moment he was going to cry or do something equally silly. The silence was resumed and presently the nurse picked up the tray and carried it out.

All day Tom fretted and tossed with the consciousness strong upon him of his loneliness, his boredom and the interminable, idle days ahead.

"What on earth do people do with themselves all the time they're hanging round getting well?" he said to his nurse querulously.

"When they're tired reading they lie still and think," she replied succinctly.

"I prefer not to think," he replied. "It's awful to think when you can't do anything about it."

"You only think about your own affairs," she observed.

"I don't spend much time thinking about other people's."

Cousin Julia

She closed her book over one finger, and, looking at him pensively out of her pedagogic eyes, remarked,

"That isn't thinking."

He didn't reply. He wasn't sure what she meant. Her next remark surprised him.

"You're a remarkable man, Mr. Collingsworth."

"You don't say so!" he ejaculated—she had not given him the impression that she considered him anything but distinctly the reverse—"Why?"

"You're so unconscious, if you'll excuse my saying so, of everything that's important."

"Well!" said he, amused rather than annoyed by what she had said. He was also interested and wondered what had prompted the remark. Important, indeed! Just because he was ill and couldn't work, did she suppose he never had done anything? Perhaps she didn't know how much money he had made. But was that, after all, important? He vaguely recalled a conversation with Virginia in which she didn't seem to think it was. He had enough already, she had said. He half smiled, remembering how pretty she had been that day. But somehow the idea persisted. He looked back at his life more analytically than he had ever done. Ever since he had grown up there had been business and when it wasn't that there had always been so many other things to do. Motoring, golf, bridge, riding, shooting, more motoring, but, and the idea struck him with a certain force, they were all physical activities—unless one could call bridge an intellectual occupation.

All these considerations brought him at last to an interesting conclusion. He was at a loss now because all his leisure had been devoted to doing things with his body—sport, eating, drinking, skimming over the hours

Cousin Julia

and days with varied, pleasant pastimes. And why not? He had been brought up that way from the days when he was first held on a pony or taught to shoulder a specially made child's gun. And now that he couldn't do any of these things he was, he told himself vaguely, up against it.

They told him to read and think! Well, he didn't like to read and the amazing possibility suddenly presented itself to him that perhaps he didn't know how to think. He could shoot and ride and run motor boats and automobiles, but he couldn't think. This discovery was followed, little by little, by others. It occurred to him that those toys he played with had been thought out by somebody. That everything he took so simply for granted as a natural background of convenience—the whole physical framework of civilization—had been created by thought. Odd it hadn't occurred to him in just that light. He was not an imbecile. He had not supposed that telephones and turbines and gasoline engines had grown like wild poppies, but they had never stood before him until now as a sheer product of the thought of men—not men like himself—but men who knew how to think. That was perhaps what his queer book-reading nurse meant by thinking—and it was indeed a very different mental activity from his own habitual ones.

“What do you think is the most important thing to do?”

He put the question to her suddenly while she was folding some linen. She picked up another towel and calmly inspected it.

“To think for mankind,” she replied, never afraid of fine phrases.

“Well,” he replied with a certain combativeness,

Cousin Julia

"they invent things and then we're criticized for just enjoying them."

"I wasn't thinking of inventions—I was thinking of ideas, liberty, for instance. Someone had to think us away from dynasties like the Ptolemies."

"She is an old school teacher," thought Tom, wondering who the Ptolemies were.

"And of science," she went on, with her hungry, undergraduate look; "you'd be dead," she added pleasantly, "if people hadn't thought about pneumonia."

Tom laughed. He hadn't felt amused for weeks, but he was amused now by this preposterous and serious-minded being who fed him and felt his pulse. It amused him to watch her, "the school ma'am," as he called her to himself—moving about with her owl-like earnestness, straining her nearsighted eyes over fat, dull-looking volumes, uttering sententious profundities when he gave her an opening. But it was good-natured amusement and under it lay a vein of very real respect.

The long quiet hours came to pass more quickly as he fell insensibly into the habit of reflecting upon the things that had never heretofore preoccupied him. He recalled scraps of history learned at school of men who studied and discovered, who wrote books and dreamed dreams, of those who had lived and starved or died martyrs to teach their fellows a better way to think or govern themselves or a new truth about the world they lived in or a higher hope of the world to come. He did not put all this to himself so clearly, to be sure; it came in scraps and fragments, but his scope widened nevertheless and he came to realize dimly how most that was vital and lasting of the world's activities he had ignored or disdained. He had spent his life juggling

Cousin Julia

fortunes; other men had fought slavery and ignorance and disease—had lifted peoples to freedom.

It all had, too, a certain relation to Virginia. He allowed himself to think of her more and more. The anger and resentment he had felt until now gave way to broader considerations. He no longer wondered why she had not married him, but strove, rather humbly, to understand why she couldn't love him. It was his first intellectual curiosity and he believed eventually he had found the answer in his recent reflections.

So the days went by, leaving Tom intent on many things in heaven and earth that had been undreamed of in his philosophy.

XLIX

THE following month found Collingsworth in Florida with his aunt. Miss Bowie and a young doctor accompanied them, not because they were indispensable, but because it amused Mrs. Collingsworth to travel with a retinue. Moreover, she was genuinely disturbed about her nephew. He was thoroughly debilitated and only a shadow of his former robust self. She had, as she was fond of saying, a feeling for race—especially the Collingsworth race. And Tom was the only surviving male bearer of the name, she herself having had no children.

He had been ill for some time, gaining strength slowly, when the doctor ordered him south. Mrs. Collingsworth promptly undertook to supervise his recovery and postponed her winter migration until he should be able to travel. She was devoted to him, and the charge, moreover, would provide an occupation for this annual period of leisure she annually found it difficult to keep as un leisuredly as she desired—perpetual activity being as the breath of her nostrils. So they entrained in befitting style and sumptuously bore down on the piney glades, the gardens of palms, the golden sands and vast blue horizons of New York's winter playground.

Tom did not care much where he went. He wanted to get well. He obeyed scrupulously the doctor's orders, rested, ate the messy things prescribed for him, and contented himself with watching the enviable activities

Cousin Julia

of the vigorous individuals about him who presumably hadn't made fools of themselves to begin with and then let themselves in for pneumonia. Of that period of excess before his illness he had thought more than once and he remembered it with disgust. It occurred to him that he had not taken his first drubbing very gallantly and he wondered if he were less of a man than he had always cheerfully considered himself. He wondered, too, what Virginia would think if she knew about it. In fact, first and last he wondered a good deal about Virginia. Since his feeling of resentment toward her had disappeared she scarcely left his thoughts and he was surprised to find how her memory obsessed him.

He was perpetually being startled by a fancied likeness to her in some graceful figure he took for a moment to be she. The beat of the waves, set to the distant, plaintive music of violins quivering in the glib passion of a café waltz, evoked her presence. The heavy sweetness of dewy, thick-petaled flowers gleaming white in a dim garden brought back her voice or the feel of her thick hair under his hand. He was dismayed to find that he was as much, perhaps more, in love with her than he had ever been. And he had an inclination, which was entirely new, to believe that he was not worthy of her—not—not clever enough, he told himself vaguely. He derived a certain comfort, however, from the fact that at least there was no one else—that he had been mistaken about that. There was no one else; Mrs. Bradford had said so in the letter she had written him months before. He had no very definite idea where all these reflections tended. It did not occur to him that perhaps everything was not quite definitely over between them, although Mrs. Bradford had so very

Cousin Julia

consolingly suggested that he wait. He remembered that that had made him angrier than anything when he first read it. But now, since he had been ill, everything was a little different, although he was rapidly forgetting the mental processes that had brought about the change.

The morning was warm but overcast, and Tom had been strolling aimlessly along the beach. He was depressed and dully uninterested in what was going on about him. At last he sat down out of sound of the bathers and gave himself up to his mood. The gray waves swung slowly up and back over the packed sands with some endless, rhythmic purpose of their own. The sea had an air of being very busy in a steady futile way, and innumerable white gulls rocked on its surface or soared and wheeled or rushed with flapping wings upon inexplicable goals in the still air above.

He was, quite simply, lonely. He wanted Virginia, wanted her with the increasing persistence of a spoiled and stubborn child whose eyes are fixed on a forbidden lollipop, with the intensity of a man who had come, as much as he was capable of, to know himself and the value to him of something he has had and lost. Before him swept the limitless gray arc where sea and sky merged, infinitely remote. His gaze lost itself in the distance and he was unaware of his aunt's approaching footsteps until she stood beside him.

"Feeling a bit low today?" she said cheerfully. "Don't get up; I'll just sit down here on the bench, if you don't mind."

Tom rose, and when she had arranged herself, re-seated himself on the warm sand near her. He pulled his knees up before him and wound his arms around

Cousin Julia

them. His aunt surveyed him attentively, worried, as she had been for some time, by his low spirits.

"Lonely?" she inquired.

He nodded, childishly. Tom was not a confiding person and had not spoken to her of his love affair since it had been so abruptly terminated, but in his present mood even his aunt's correctly upholstered bosom was a place where he could have laid his head and wept. Mrs. Collingsworth had heard rumors of the broken engagement and had laid the period of intemperance that followed at its door, presuming, or at least hoping philosophically that it would help to heal the wound. She had heard that young men frequently did that under these circumstances—in fact it had become almost a convention—and usually came out of it right side up and whole again. But this didn't seem to be the case with Tom. She perceived all the symptoms of very active regrets and decided to investigate them herself.

"I suppose, Tom," she said with a little sigh, patting her laces, "that it's all about the girl, of course."

He nodded once more.

"You are not——" she began.

"No, it's all off," said Tom mournfully.

"Too bad!" And then presently: "But after all"—she waved her parasol at the gay crowds disporting themselves farther down the beach—"don't they—don't you—there are lots of pretty girls down there, Tom."

"I know it," he replied, "and the awful part of it is that I don't care. I want her. I never wanted anyone else and I never shall."

"Humph!" said his aunt. "I daresay it's not quite so bad as that. However, if you want her, you ought to have her." That was Mrs. Collingsworth's attitude toward life. At least, that was what she felt life's atti-

Cousin Julia

tude toward her should be, toward her and all Collingsworths. "What happened—if I may ask?"

"Nothing, I guess. She just didn't love me."

"Nonsense!"

"No, fact. I guess I'm not clever enough about books and all that. I thought about a lot of stuff when I was sick about people who do things—things that are different from all this——" He waved his hand vaguely at his surroundings. "I don't exactly know now what I did think, but I remember she used to try and start something like it with me. You understand."

Mrs. Collingsworth did not understand.

"No, I don't. And I don't think you do. I don't think you have the slightest idea what you mean. All this"—she imitated his gesture—"is very pleasant. Besides," she added literally, "it's only for a month or so, and then there's always New York and the Adirondacks and Europe and that awful place, wherever it is, she lives."

Tom didn't answer. What she said had no bearing on his meaning, but after all was only the more understandable to him. There were indeed no end of pleasant places if one could only be in them with Virginia.

"Well, anyway," he said presently, "she didn't want to marry me."

"Incredible!" murmured his aunt. Incredible that she should not want to marry Tom, with his name, his money, his youth, his good looks—for he was even handsome since his illness, she thought; it became him to be thin. All in all, for a nephew of hers to be rejected by some unknown beauty of the Middle West was profoundly incomprehensible to her.

"Have you heard anything from them since?"

"Only this," said Tom. He had Mrs. Bradford's let-

Cousin Julia

ter with him. It comforted him sometimes to read it. He pulled it out of his pocket and handed it to Mrs. Collingsworth.

She produced a pair of glasses on an exceedingly short handle and held them to her eyes, spreading the soiled and crumpled letter on her knees. When she had read it down to the cramped signature, "Julia Bradford," she read it again, and her worldly old eyes twinkled. There was that in the letter which she understood and appreciated. "Virginia may not want him," she said to herself, "but Julia *does*." She felt, moreover, that she would like Julia Bradford—deep called unto deep. Aloud she remarked,

"It's a clever letter. I think I could get on with Mrs. Bradford."

"Oh, she's all there," he replied carelessly.

"I'm inclined to think she is," was the reply. "In fact, Tom, it's quite plain that Julia Bradford wants you in the family, and I seem to feel that she is very apt to get what she wants—so you might just as well go out there and marry Virginia sooner as later."

Tom turned to her, startled. His wondering gaze met hers and held it for a moment, but at last he shook his head and replied,

"Not a chance; Virginia settled all that."

"Did she? I think," she added, handing him back the letter, "that I'd pin my faith to Mrs. Julia and try again."

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OUT of such small beginnings do our futures grow, that within a very short time after his return to New York Tom was on his way to Columbia. The affair amused and interested Mrs. Collingsworth. Of course she would, theoretically, have preferred to pluck her future niece from some familiar plant that had rooted and branched within that small section of the borough of Manhattan Mrs. Collingsworth considered to be New York. But if it had to be a wild flower let it by all means spring from as sane a parent stalk as Julia Bradford.

Tom had refused steadily to go. He did not wish, he declared, to make himself ridiculous, or to lay himself open to inevitable rebuffs. There was, however, a certain amount of business connected with Columbia that required immediate attention, and this he decided should be looked after by his secretary. But when the man came to him to receive the necessary instructions, Tom experienced one of those sudden changes of heart to which we are all so liable, or perhaps he merely discovered the intention he had really had all along.

"I've decided to run out to Columbia myself," he heard himself saying, "to close out the business. I'll leave tomorrow." And once the decision was made he found himself curiously elated by the prospect of the trip. After some hesitation he wrote Mrs. Bradford, saying, merely, that he was coming to Columbia on

Cousin Julia

business, and thanking her for the letter she had so kindly written him and which had remained unanswered because of his illness. As, however, he neglected to mail it until the following day, it only reached her on the morning of his arrival.

She opened it with her usual apparent tranquillity, though perhaps one is inclined to underrate the emotionalism of natures as inexpressive as hers. She was alone at the time in the house in Highland Road. Mr. Bradford had not been well and had, with some difficulty, been persuaded to go to The Pines for a fortnight of rest and relaxation. Virginia accompanied him. She was delighted to go, as she loved the place and because any change from the monotony of her existence was very welcome to her. They had been gone several days.

Mrs. Bradford read the letter carefully and then, after observing the date on her calendar, she laid it down and, removing her eyeglasses, tapped the desk blotter lightly. Presently she drew a sheet of paper to her and began a letter to J. C. She got no further, however, than "Dear Jim," when, after an interval of reflection, she tore up the page and took another from the rack.

DEAR VIRGIE:

Tom is in town on business and wants to see J. C. I think it would be too bad for your father to break up his visit and come back, so am sending Tom to The Pines. I hope you won't do anything silly, like leaving your father alone and coming back here. Tom won't eat you. In fact, I expect he's not much more anxious to see you than you are to see him. You must persuade your father that it's all right and to see him. He might take it into his head not to on your account, and I think it will be helpful in

Cousin Julia

many ways for them to have a talk. I will telegraph when I know what train he takes.

Your loving mother,
JULIA BRADFORD.

She had the letter carried to the post office and then, rising from her desk, went to the telephone and called up Collingsworth.

WHEN Tom approached the familiar house that afternoon he told himself he was glad after all that he was not going to see Virginia. It would have been disturbing and probably painful and it would be better on the whole to finish his business as quickly as possible and be off. But when he left Mrs. Bradford he found that his plans had undergone a somewhat alarming rearrangement. He had decided, he discovered, that it was important for him to see Mr. Bradford personally and that he was leaving for The Pines the next evening. He learned that Virginia would be very glad to see him. That she was a little run down and depressed—had not been in good spirits for some time and had gone out very little. He wondered just what to conclude from this. That—if he let his imagination and his desires run away with him—she had perhaps missed him, had even regretted what she had done, that it had in reality all been a mistake as Mrs. Bradford had implied in the famous letter—the result of a girlish panic or caprice?

He did not, however, dwell long on eventualities. The bare knowledge of what was before him overshadowed everything. It did not seem possible that he was really to see her again, and in the poetic intimacy of a forest cabin. He was immensely excited by the imminence of the encounter and a little scared. Romance had stepped back into his life and cast her multicolored glory upon his way. Business was forgotten, and, hir-

Cousin Julia

ing a car, he drove far out on the twilight roads thinking of Virginia.

The next day seemed endless to Tom. He felt trembly and in a hurry about nothing. He did not go near the office and lunched delightfully with Mrs. Bradford, finding her companionship strangely beguiling. He had expected to be self-conscious and ill at ease with her before their interview the day before, but nothing of the kind had occurred. She was as detached and cool as she had been in the old days when he dropped in to call or to take Virginia to the Driving Club, and seemed pleasantly unaware of any high-pitched personal relation. In the afternoon he shopped and bought extravagant ties and socks, all of which he discarded when he whistlingly repacked his bag for the third or fourth time before leaving.

The sleepless night which he spent in the pestilential atmosphere of his lower berth, breathing cinders and dreaming incoherent, wakeful dreams as the train ground and rumbled its way through the darkness, passed quickly, winged with its tingling anticipations. There was no very definite hope back of those anticipations—it was just that he was going to see her. Perhaps nothing would result from their meeting, but he looked no further than the impending reality of being with her again, of watching and listening to her.

Spring waited for him in the woods when he stepped from the train onto the small wooden platform of the station—the sweet, shrill symphony of spring, with its treble clamor of birds, its high greens and crude pale pinks, its sky the bright young blue of a baby's eyes. They skirted the lake on the drive over and Tom breathed deep the mingled scents of pines and apple blossoms, and buttoned his coat closer against the fresh

Cousin Julia

breeze that troubled the waters with fingers dipped in melting snow.

As they approached the house he perceived Virginia and her father waiting for him on the small unroofed veranda. She seemed to be dressed in blue, with her soft hair blowing about her eyes. A panic overtook him and at the same time an absurd longing to jump out of the buckboard and rush ahead and kiss her. His heart assumed abnormal size and activity. It beat against his ribs and mounted to his throat and almost strangled him. He coughed once or twice huskily and straightened his tie and then they had drawn up before the house. Tom found himself greeting Mr. Bradford first. He crushed the older man's hand in his, staring hard into his gray beard without seeing it and then, feeling a little as if he might faint, turned and took her outstretched hand and looked into his lady's adorable gray eyes.

To Virginia he seemed exceedingly composed and rather stern. He was thinner than she had ever seen him and paler, a pallor intensified by his excitement. They all went into the house and were presently seated round the table before an open fire—it was still chilly indoors and rather dank—drinking the boiled coffee and eating the salt pork frizzled to a delicious crisp, of J. C.'s predilection.

Several days had passed and Tom was still at The Pines—days of enchantment to him, days that were to Virginia unexpectedly pleasant. Her prosaic and rather studious winter had been by no means altogether agreeable to her. She quite naturally missed the amusements, the admiration and flirtations to which she was accustomed, and had had at times the unpleasant sensa-

Cousin Julia

tion of slipping gradually into the dreary twilight of old maidenhood. A nature as fluid as hers was peculiarly adapted to submit to the domination of a will as definite and unrelenting as Mrs. Bradford's, and Virginia had drifted with its current, lacking the initiative and self-reliance to alter conditions for herself.

And now after the long period of abstinence she could scarcely fail to enjoy the feast of admiration spread before her. Tom's extravagant delight in her proximity, his flagrant adoration, restored her self-confidence and lifted her back to the happy region where beauty reigns from its little garlanded throne.

It seemed to her, moreover, that Tom had improved. The absence of his former ruddy muscularity was pleasing to her, though of less importance than a certain new quality she felt in their companionship. He seemed more sympathetic and at least anxious, in a way that he had never been before, to understand and share her ideas. He did not often succeed, but he no longer waved them aside contemptuously. She was agreeably surprised by the change and perhaps exaggerated its extent. Then, too, there was no environment better suited to Tom than the rough out-of-door life of The Pines. He belonged to it as inevitably, it occurred to Virginia, as Félix did to the French drawing-rooms and marble terrace of Highland Road. It was the only time it had happened to her to compare them. They were worlds apart and there was nothing in Tom's personality or companionship to suggest the other.

It was a still, sunlit morning. They had been tramping since breakfast and at last sat down to rest under the scented canopy of some wild crab apple trees in full bloom that decked in bridal finery a little hillside sloping to the lake. The white flowers hung above them

Cousin Julia

motionless except when the birds in their twittering activities stirred the flowering sprays and sent a flurry of petals drifting earthward.

Virginia pulled off her knitted tam and dropped it on the ground beside her. She was dressed in the same gray-blue jersey cloth that had sent terrified yearnings through Tom the day of his arrival and no one, he felt, had any business to be as pretty as she looked in the sunshine of this spring fairyland. A sense of well-being and idle enjoyment possessed her. She sat down, leaning against the smooth, sloping trunk of a squat apple tree and he half lay on the ground near her. He was silent for some time, thinking. At last he spoke:

"I suppose I—I guess I'll go back tomorrow, Virgie."

She turned and looked down at him.

"So soon, Tom?"

"I only came for a day," he said with a little embarrassed laugh; "I can't pretend that business is keeping me any longer."

Virginia's eyes left him and traveled out over the pale, opalescent surface of the lake. She had been about to protest against his going, but a sudden consciousness of their relations restrained her. She remained silent.

"There's just one thing," he said after a moment, sitting up and shaking his cuffs into place, "that I'd like to ask you before I go away." He picked a white petal from the ground and stared down at it in his hand. He had seen the flush that rose so easily and so charmingly to her clear skin creep into her cheeks and wondered if she would tell him not to go on. She must have felt that what he had to say concerned herself and him, and

Cousin Julia

had she wished to keep away from personal matters she could have stopped him then, but she did not stop him, and somewhat encouraged he went on:

“You see, when you first wrote to me as you did I was pretty upset and—and angry. In fact I was furious. I couldn’t see why you didn’t want to marry me. I acted like a fool for a while, got drunk all the time and everything. Oh, I showed a good broad streak of yellow all right.”

He paused and Virginia moved uneasily. She kept her eyes turned from him, still resting on the mists beyond the lake.

“And then, after I got sick, I thought about it a lot, and I realized that the important thing, that is, the— the *point* was not that you wouldn’t marry me, but that you couldn’t love me. Not that that’s surprising at all, but up to then, you see, I’d always taken it for granted that you ought to be able to love me just because I wanted you to.”

The feeling of embarrassment that had laid hold of Virginia deepened. She felt that she was absurd sitting there in silence, but he had taken her by surprise and she did not know what to say. She had spent so much time considering her feeling for Félix that she had given almost no thought to that which she had experienced for Tom. Félix, Félix! Her mind flew back to him and to that time of gradual surrender to the only passion she had known, to its moment of revelation and the dark months that followed when she had fought it inch by inch from her memories. There had been no room in her feelings or reflections during all that time for Tom. Obviously he, too, must have had his emotional activities, but she had scarcely given them a thought till now, when he partly disclosed them to her.

Cousin Julia

How complete her absorption had been in that unbidden and selfish infatuation! How she regretted it! And yet even now when she permitted herself a backward glance at the hour when love had held his ruby chalice at her lips, its magic—black magic if you like but magic still—all but caught her in its spell once more. The image of Félix became for an instant a poignant reality to her—who had thought to have banished it forever from her consciousness! But who can be certain he has looked for the last time with the eyes of memory into a certain face, or for the last time heard echoing in its white corridors a voice that life tells him to forget! Virginia was frightened by this ghost of a dead sentiment she had believed would visit her no more. She turned quickly to the young man at her side. Perhaps she felt instinctively that through him it might best be exorcised.

Meanwhile he was speaking again:

“And ever since then, ever since I was sick I mean, I’ve wanted to ask you why, I want you to tell me why you couldn’t love me—for my own good, you know,” he interpolated with a queer little smile—“just why you couldn’t.”

Perhaps no question could have touched a more responsive chord in Virginia. She had asked herself so many quite as futile wherefors as this one! At last she answered hesitatingly, anxious not to hurt him,

“It’s an impossible question, Tom. You never know why something is or—or isn’t, no matter how much you try.”

“I knew you’d say that, but I think people do know in a way; there’s always some one reason more than another.” Her hand was lying on the grass beside him and all at once he wanted terribly to take it into his,

Cousin Julia

just for a moment. He looked away and gripped his knees tighter with his arms. "Please tell me," he added firmly.

Virginia sat for a moment thinking of what he had asked her. "We didn't seem to be very, that is, we didn't seem to have so very much in common then, did we?" she said falteringly.

"I thought that was it. What you mean is that I wasn't clever and couldn't talk to you about all sorts of things, and all that. I didn't know then what a chump I am, but I do now." His expression was set and rather grim as he looked steadily before him. "I just wanted you to know that I don't blame you. I did blame you at first because I was a conceited ass, but I guess I understand now."

Virginia had never felt so close to him before. That he could analyze the situation brought their points of view into a rapport they had never had. His new humility touched her, too, and his unhappiness. That he was so palpably unhappy and because of her could not fail to have its appeal.

"Tom," she said softly, "dear Tom."

He sprang to his feet. "Don't speak to me that way, Virgie—it hurts too much."

She rose, too, and stood facing him. A sudden wave of affection for him swept over her.

"Oh, I don't want you to be unhappy, I don't, I don't, Tom." She laid her hands on his shoulders and looked up at him, the tears filling her eyes. He saw them, and her face turned to his with its expression of kindness and sympathy, and suddenly all his strength and all his resolution melted and vanished from him. He seized her hands and crushed them in his.

"You know I love you—you know how I love you! I

Cousin Julia

can't go away without you again, I can't, Virgie—I'd rather die!"

He stopped abruptly, appalled at his own rashness and fearful of what the result might be. She drew away from him and stood silently, wondering what she could say, what she wanted to say and what she felt. Her state of mind had never been so chaotic, her inclination so obscure and involved. At last she stooped and picking up her cap put it on and vaguely tucked back her rebellious hair.

"Let's go home," she murmured.

"Wait a minute, Virgie," he said very gravely. "Are you angry with me for what I've just said—if so I apologize and of course I shan't say anything about it again."

His quiet dignity impressed her. She knew that he was strong and good and his love was a warm, sweet thing to feel about her. He bent toward her. "Are you angry?" he repeated.

She asked the question of herself and the answer came to her vividly. She was not—angry as he said, not even displeased. Could it be possible that she was glad—glad to hear what he had said?

"No," was the reply at last. She realized how much more than just that it implied and raised her eyes to him, full of a new tenderness.

He gazed at her, aware of that tenderness and striving to guess at its extent. Did it mean the fulfillment of his heart's desire—that the loneliness and disappointment were things of the past, that her lips, her love, her dear companionship might still be won? He thought it did. Suddenly and bewilderingly happy at his renewed hope, he turned from her with a little exultant laugh.

Cousin Julia

"Oh, Virgie, it's great to be alive!" he exclaimed in words absurdly inadequate to the depth of the emotion that prompted them.

They walked back through the lofty pines so cool and aloof from this little human drama of love going on beneath them, indifferent to it as they were to the changing seasons—to the coming of gilded days and birds, or the bleak tempests of winter. Beneath them soft fragrant things budded from the earth, intent, too, on their moment of life and fruition, driven by its inexplicable purpose as were the silent, ancient trees.

Tom's joy in the unexpected hope held out to him persisted. He believed she had come to care for him again. He said nothing more just then, willing to postpone the final moment of certainty or faintly afraid, still, of making his last play for this immense stake. But he hugged the delightful possibility to him. His joyousness overflowed and charged the whole atmosphere with a thrill of electric enthusiasm and hope—an emanation that can only come from deep sincerity and youth and a love long deferred but winging to its goal.

Virginia reacted to it with a sense of subtle excitement. It went rather to her head and life took to itself once more the gay colors of spring. It is pleasant after all to be a fairy princess, dispenser of such enchantment as she perceived that one wave of her wand to have wrought upon a fellow being. It is pleasant to confer happiness, especially if the doing involves that subtlest of all vanities, the sex vanity. Life would be very different if he went away as he said he must and left her to her books and solitude and a companionship cherished but unproductive of illusion.

THEY were very gay at luncheon. J. C. had always liked Tom and rejoiced now to see him in such good spirits. Whatever he may have thought of this renewed companionship and its possible results, he made no comment. When they had finished he inquired genially whether Tom were still too much of an invalid to do a little work. "Try me!" had been Tom's reply. It consisted of cutting props for a decrepit pine that stood alone at one corner of the house and leaned dangerously toward the lower end. The next windstorm he said might topple it over and smash the roof. So they went to work with saws and ropes and Virginia watched them from the porch.

She had changed to some warm, white garments and lay on a canvas deck chair, lazily inactive. At first she observed them tramping back and forth in a sort of jovial activity, pleased with each other's society, understanding and appreciative of each other as usual. But inevitably her thoughts went back to her present problem. She knew that Tom would again ask her to marry him before he left. She must free herself from this mood of benevolent amiability and excitement and consider it all soberly and clearly. The way she took now must be trod to the end. And why not take this good thing life offered her—the devotion, the unswerving love of a man for whom she felt both affection and respect, in whom, more than anything, she could trust? She had wasted tears enough on something she

Cousin Julia

could not have and which, indeed, she had found was not worth the having. But she was not one to take—as most of us have done since we crawled into existence on this whirling ball of mud—instead just what she could get. It would seem neither fair to her nor in accordance with her ideals. In the present instance, however, this was scarcely the case. She did not underestimate the value and beauty of what was offered in his love. It touched her deeply and had already awakened a response. She was getting so much—more, she felt, than she deserved. It was merely that her young ideals had aspired vaguely, with but a passing moment of definiteness, to something else. The dream, perhaps, was still there, but it could be relegated to that buried niche where most of us have enshrined a secret idol.

Moreover, Tom had changed. He was no longer quite the unthinking, careless, grown-up boy who had left so many unfilled gaps in their intimacy, but a man whose sympathies had been awakened. It was possible, she reflected, that this change was only a beginning, that the development would go on, and that they would grow together into an understanding that would be satisfying and profound. So the dream might, after all, not be buried, but could be wrought, little by little, with compromise and adjustments, into the stuff of their lives. Perhaps it had been wiser for their future happiness to have relinquished it entirely—but dreams die hard. This, however, lay with the future and did not occupy her now. Nor did she realize, perhaps, how profoundly weary she had become of the endless conflict with her mother—a silent clashing of wills that made itself felt so poignantly, though with no outward manifestation—the depth of her relief that it should end. Its effect, like that of the monotony, the petty

Cousin Julia

tyrannies of an exaggerated economy, all the subtle alteration in her life, was none the less real for being unconsciously experienced. Such reactions have a deeper influence upon our attitude toward persons, as well as things, than is sometimes realized. This reaction had had its influence on her attitude towards Tom.

Meanwhile the afternoon was waning. The lengthening shadows brought a breath of evening chill. She shivered and rose from her chair. Tom and J. C. had disappeared and Virginia left the porch and strolled down the long flight of wooden steps that descended to the lake side. Twin rows of willows arched their branches above it, and the young green leaves twinkled and shook and whispered mysteriously over her head. She sat down on the last step and watched the sunset lights glow and change and die upon the breathless surface of the lake. A muskrat slipped from under the dock and smoothly cut his way through the still, silver water, and white mists appeared and cloaked the dark trunks of the pines.

So now at last her life was to be decided. She had reached an end and a beginning. The end, it seemed, of those vague imaginings, of that chimerical future, mysterious and splendid with its obscure promise of a glory, a triumph or an ecstasy unwarranted by achievement, untranslatable into terms of life. The future was upon her now, revealed and tangible. A good husband, children doubtless, wealth, comforts and, let her not forget, an affection as real as the unreality of what she had fancied she was giving up. If something rang faintly a knell of things lost or changed and whispered that this future might be bare of vital perceivings, of perilous adventure toward high, glittering peaks to whose intenser sunshine and vaster prospects she had

Cousin Julia

youthfully aspired, it was almost unheeded, for she had now entered upon a new road and was outdistancing its clamor. This is a road beset, perhaps, by those who aspire but lack the genius, the *elan*, the whatever it may be, to drive them to achievement, by all those whose visioning is beyond their strength.

As she thought of Tom the emotions of the day returned to her, agreeable emotions full of the charm of his love-making—the eternal, edged charm of knowing oneself desired—and incipient response stirred within her. He had looked, she remembered, like a slim athlete standing before her in the orchard, with a new and interesting fineness and intensity—qualities made valuable by the truth and loyalty on which she knew them to be founded. How in the light of what had happened must she appreciate that foundation!

Gradually, with the inevitability of character, the end merged itself for her into the beginning—the beginning of this new road. Perhaps for such as she the only glittering heights possible are those fancied ones along the way to which such souls must lift their commonplaces—to which she now set out to lift hers. Thus Tom and the possibilities of their intercourse began to assume a romance of their own to satisfy her necessities. What life would do to that romance, life alone would disclose.

For a long time she sat on the wooden step. A blue twilight came upon the forest world and a hidden frog dropped at intervals his harsh note into the azure silence, and she achieved a glamour for this forthcoming adventure in love. She saw herself creating with him spheres of nobility of grace of achievement and at last, thrilling to the reality of her recreated dreams, she mounted slowly to the house.

Cousin Julia

He met her on the veranda, waiting in his strength and eagerness for her to come to him.

"Look, Virgie, look back of you!"

She turned. There, like some monstrous shape of fancy, a gigantic moon—a swollen disk of molten brass—slid from beyond the lake and sailed upward across the darkening sky. It tinged with mystery the spring night, and cold, dank odors of hidden things crept about them from the forest. She could hear the loud beating of his heart, and his passion enveloped and then invaded her.

"Virgie, do you love me at last?" he whispered.

"I believe, oh, Tom, I believe I do!" And she laughed a little, tenderly, when his ecstasy found no readier eloquence than the repetition, husky with emotion, of his earlier exclamation,

"Gee, Virgie, it is great to be alive!"



THEY telegraphed their news to Mrs. Bradford the next day. Tom was anxious that she should know.

“Do you think she’ll be pleased?” he had asked Mr. Bradford boyishly, and J. C. had answered with a passing gravity that he believed she would.

She took the news of her victory, as all good fighters do, quietly, and standing in the doorway with the yellow paper in her hand, measured the spacious rooms with a cool gaze, wondering whether five hundred or six could be invited to the wedding.

